

THE COST OF CONSCIENCE

A collection of provocations on the relationship between technology and the climate crisis

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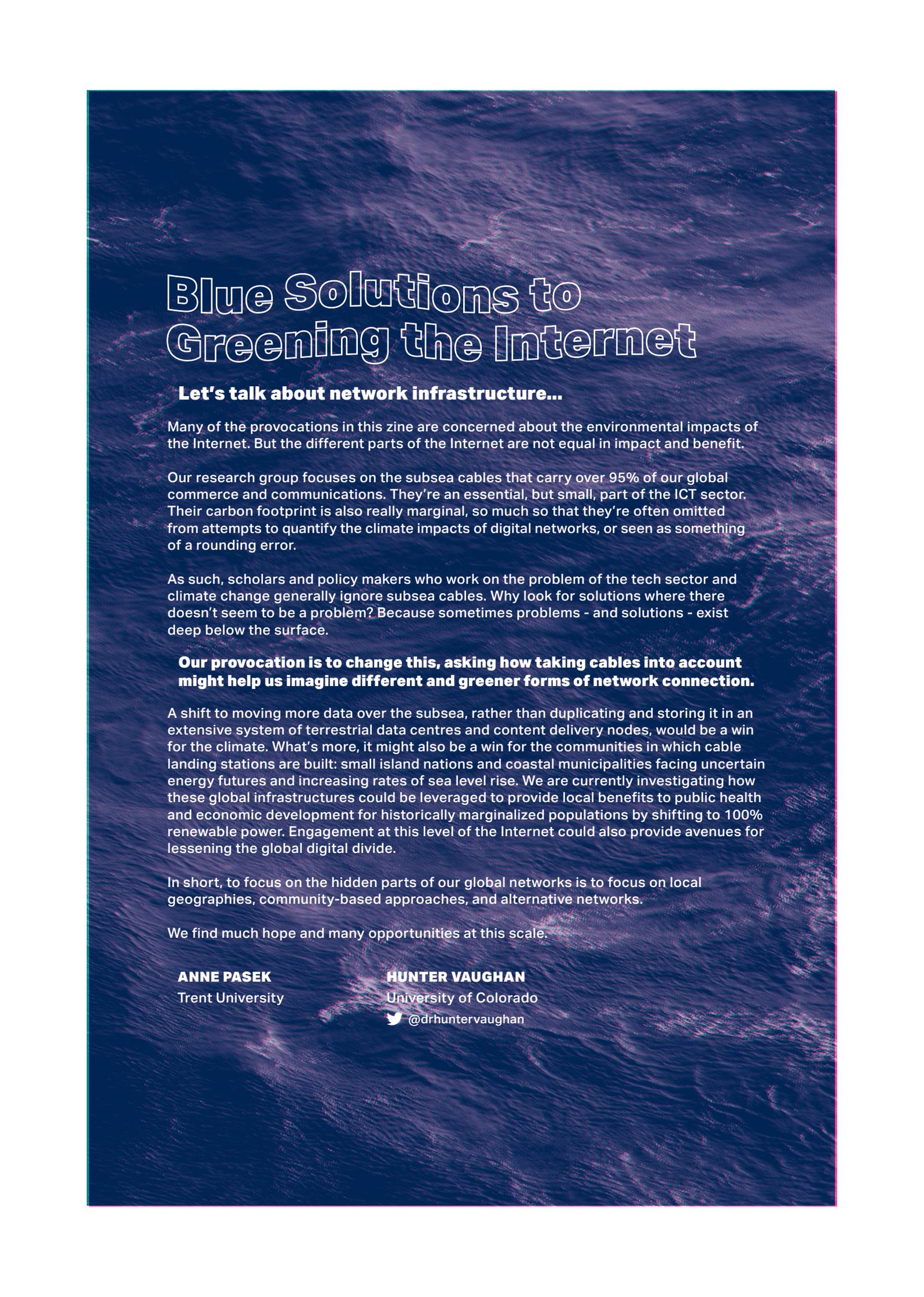
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Blue Solutions to Greening the Internet

Let's talk about network infrastructure...

Many of the provocations in this zine are concerned about the environmental impacts of the Internet. But the different parts of the Internet are not equal in impact and benefit.

Our research group focuses on the subsea cables that carry over 95% of our global commerce and communications. They're an essential, but small, part of the ICT sector. Their carbon footprint is also really marginal, so much so that they're often omitted from attempts to quantify the climate impacts of digital networks, or seen as something of a rounding error.

As such, scholars and policy makers who work on the problem of the tech sector and climate change generally ignore subsea cables. Why look for solutions where there doesn't seem to be a problem? Because sometimes problems - and solutions - exist deep below the surface.

Our provocation is to change this, asking how taking cables into account might help us imagine different and greener forms of network connection.

A shift to moving more data over the subsea, rather than duplicating and storing it in an extensive system of terrestrial data centres and content delivery nodes, would be a win for the climate. What's more, it might also be a win for the communities in which cable landing stations are built: small island nations and coastal municipalities facing uncertain energy futures and increasing rates of sea level rise. We are currently investigating how these global infrastructures could be leveraged to provide local benefits to public health and economic development for historically marginalized populations by shifting to 100% renewable power. Engagement at this level of the Internet could also provide avenues for lessening the global digital divide.

In short, to focus on the hidden parts of our global networks is to focus on local geographies, community-based approaches, and alternative networks.

We find much hope and many opportunities at this scale.

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