

# Earth Charter Magazine

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## EARTH CHARTER MAGAZINE VOL III JUNE 2024

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# INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce the third edition of the Earth Charter Magazine, a publication that brings together diverse voices and contributes to the purpose of our UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development, which focuses its efforts at the intersection of sustainability, values, and education.

In this issue, you will find six articles from authors coming from Canada, P.R. China, Italy, Mexico, Peru, the United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe, who have been invited by Earth Charter International to share their work, thoughts, insights and expertise. The tone of articles ranges from personal reflections to sharing results of research, work and experiences.

In his article, Bob Jickling, Professor Emeritus at Lakehead University, Canada, explores the bounds of environmental ethics, the importance of bringing that to education, and the role the Earth Charter can play in this. The article highlights ways to make ethical thinking an everyday activity.

Silvia Ferrero, an Italian Social Anthropologist and Earth Charter Certified Educator based in the United Kingdom, shares her personal journey with the Earth Charter, which widened her anthropological paradigm to include the interbeing and interconnectedness of all life forms.

John Bhurekeni, postdoctoral fellow at the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University, South Africa, expounds elements of his work and doctoral research, focused on using stories and an Afrophilic

philosophy for children to develop a strong sense of identity and relevant competences in their contexts. His research is based on his work as a primary school teacher in Zimbabwe.

Erika Reinkendorf, an economist and educator from Peru, shares an overview of the research work she did by visiting six schools in Costa Rica that are implementing Education for Sustainable Development to learn from them about how they are doing it and what elements they have that can serve to inspire others.

Ma Shuang, Liaoning University, China and Jeffrey Petts, author of 'Aesthetics and Design: The Value of Everyday Living,' jointly write an article that highlights the educational value of aesthetic appreciation of the natural world and links the work of William Morris on the importance of cultivating aesthetic sensibility in all we do with the Earth Charter.

Mateo Alfredo Castillo Ceja, Katia Beatriz Villafán Vidales, and Janeth Ortiz Ruiz, professors at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Mexico, offers an overview report of their project that linked food cultural tradition with food sustainability and sovereignty. The project sought to make the 1st Ancestral Food Fair of Quiroga more sustainable using the Earth Charter as an evaluation tool.

We hope these voices and articles will inspire you and generate new insights.

MIRIAN VILELA, MARIA SOSA SEGNINI,  
AND WILL STATON  
**EDITORIAL TEAM**



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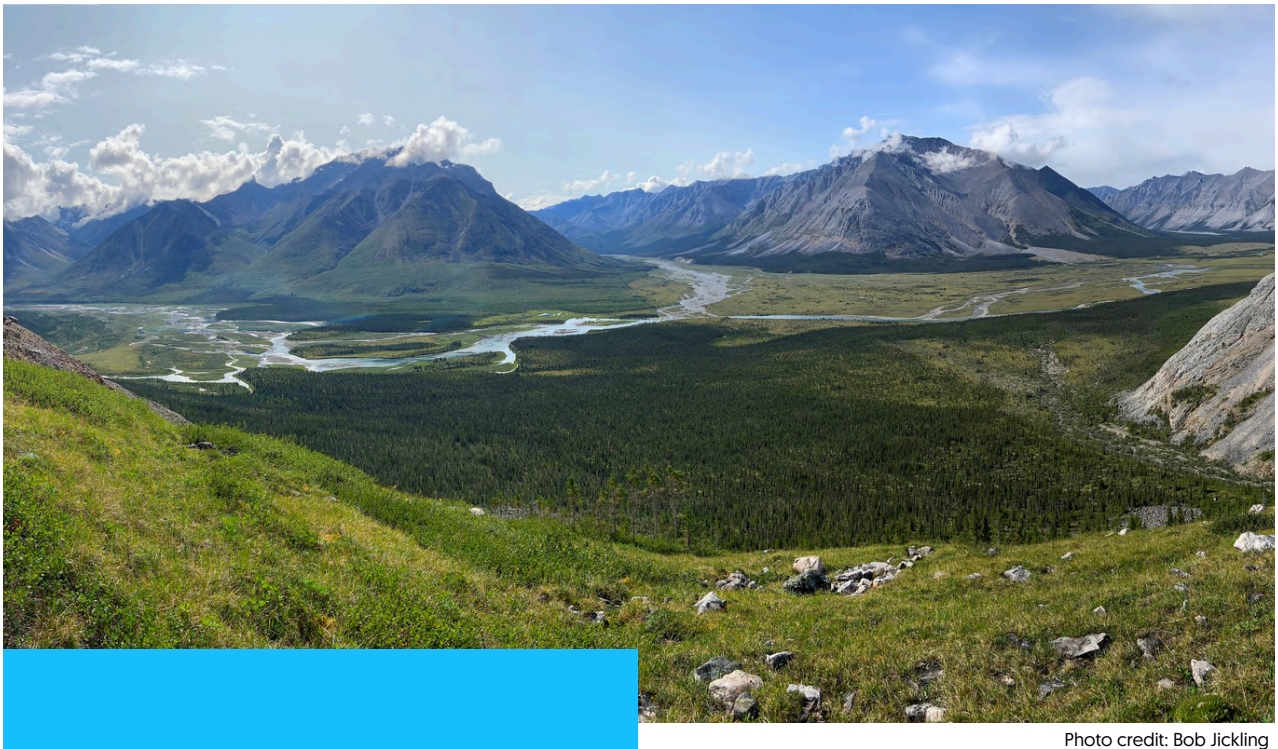


Photo credit: Bob Jickling

# The Earth Charter and Environmental Ethics: Getting Started and Going Further



Bob Jickling

Bob Jickling, Professor Emeritus at Lakehead University, has interests in environmental education and philosophy and his current research attempts to find openings for radical re-visioning of education. His most recent books include *Wild Pedagogies: Touchstones for Re-Negotiating Education and the Environment in the Anthropocene* and *Environmental ethics: A sourcebook for educators*. As a long-time wilderness traveller, much of his inspiration is derived from the landscape of his home in Canada's Yukon.



I've noticed an uptick in talk about ethics lately. In times of extreme uncertainty and stress, this is what happens. It was no surprise, then, that there was a lot of talk about environmental ethics at the World Environmental Education Congress in 2024. Alarming, however, there was a shortage of ideas about how to bring them into practice. A notable exception was the presence of the Earth Charter.

If you are reading this, you are already a leader in shifting the practice of environmental ethics from philosophy departments, ethics boards, and professional codes and onto the streets where ethics meet action. As newcomers to the Earth Charter or as veteran Charter practitioners, you are critical to what counts, to what actually happens on the ground. Effectively, ethics are defined by their usage; ethics are what people do. And what you, as practitioners, do is profoundly important, every day.

### **So, I wonder: What more can we do to make ethics an everyday activity? [1]**

Part of the answer will require some myth-busting. First, ethics should not just be the domain of heroes and saints, or even professors and professionals. This means that ethics must become part of normal behaviour for everyone. And second, ethics as an everyday activity isn't a totally alien idea. Everyone operates from within value systems, or stories, and makes value choices every day. While some of these are simple consumer preferences revolving around questions of taste, others

wrestle with profound decisions about what they should do when confronted with issues like climate change and biodiversity loss. Ethical thinking is a means for making this process more explicit. It is a process that enables groups and individuals to examine the cultural systems and stories that frame their choices—through analysis and practice.

Some readers might have taken notice of “practice” in the last paragraph and marked it as a departure from more traditional configurations of ethics based around rules, duties, and debate. True. Environmental ethics has been at the forefront of broadening conceptions of ethics. [There is a growing body of literature that emphasises contextual, process-oriented, place-based, and storied approaches to ethical reflection and action.](#) The field for deliberations—intellectual and physical—is expanding. This is encouraging, especially for us, who are often confronted with seemingly irresolvable quandaries. It seems impossible in our present world to consistently lead a good life, all the time.



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Ethics can be messy, confusing, and contradictory. However, looking at ethics in a more expansive way can often release us from the burden of attempting to come up with a single correct answer and offer us, instead, practical ways to move ethically-forward in life, one step at a time.

I was fortunate to have experienced this expansion on interest in ethics while attending an Earth Charter conference in Costa Rica, during January 2019. It became obvious that the Earth Charter is an incredibly useful entry into the thorny world of environmental ethics. As a gathering of ideas, it contains an array of starting points for imaginative educational practices. Indeed, the creative application of these starting points in the projects presented were as broad as the number of presenters. Indeed, the Earth Charter is both an instrument for getting started, but also as an agent for experimenting with practices linking environmental and social issues and discovering new possibilities. Moreover, the Earth Charter work is bolstered by a growing community of practitioners.

Mirian Vilela [2] and I have often discussed the Earth Charter and the broader evolution of environmental ethics. We agree that the Charter is a great starting point. After all, it is difficult to start with a blank slate; we can't begin with an absence of ideas. And the Charter has brought to light ideas about ethics that have long been suspended in a kind of educational quarantine.



We also agree that the next big challenge will be to take environmental ethics further, beyond the Earth Charter that has enlivened so many practitioners. Indeed, it could itself be seen as a stepping stone for entering the broader field of environmental ethics. After all, the gathered ideas in the Charter all come from somewhere, and some folks might want to enrich their own thinking through a better understanding of the reasoning and nuances of these sources.

Another tool to aid in this journey is our book titled *Environmental Ethics: A Sourcebook for Educators* (Jickling et al., 2021). This text acknowledges that teaching about ethics can be intimidating. However, it doesn't have to be this way, and ultimately, it must not. With this in mind, each chapter begins with accessible activities that provide learning experiences with manageable entry points into some aspect of environmental ethics. In many ways, it offers its own starting points. Then each chapter concludes with a summary of some of the theoretical background that supports those activities.

This book raises interesting questions that reflect emergent trends in environmental ethics. And these questions often frame the subject matter and activities for specific chapters. Collectively, they amount to a set of tentative inspirations to help educators expand the scope of their practices, reflect on their own conceptions of ethics, and make pedagogical decisions about content and practices. Above all, the questions are intended to prompt practical outcomes.

I will, for the balance of this article, explore some of these questions. Their importance will be discussed, and then I will add a few pedagogical queries that practitioners can ask of themselves. These concluding provocations, sometimes called “touchstones,” [3] are intended to be revisited at intervals as reminders of possible teaching aims and as self-measures for gauging one's own pedagogical progress. Of course, they are just starting points, too, and you are encouraged to expand them, or even rewrite them to better reflect your educational aims.

## Must environmental ethics be grounded in abstract principles?

This question goes to the heart of many traditional approaches to environmental ethics. Often, initial forays into this field were rooted in extensions of ethical frameworks based on abstract concepts such as “rights,” being extended to “animal rights,” or “maximizing good and minimizing pain” as deployed in the “animal liberation movement.”

Early ecofeminists found rationalist approaches grounded in codes, fundamental principles, duties, and moral obligations to be inadequate. *They argued that no ethics framework could be complete without room for feelings, context, and first-person narrative—or storytelling.* And ethics were sometimes framed as “bioregional narratives.”





Then, in this mix, was Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss [1988, 1999]. He pondered a radical break from ethics that were reliant on duties and the guilt that could arise from failing to meet expectations. He was doubtful about how willing people are to sacrifice their own interests out of a sense of duty to a larger purpose. For him, guilt was a poor motivator.

Næss's reaction was to look for new starting points. [For him, the key was to discover the world in ways that were positive and would generate action out of fondness and empathy.](#)

In another twist, Louise Profeit LeBlanc [1996] brings a Yukon-Canadian First Nations perspective to these discussions. For her, ethics are about what we do so that people will tell good stories about us after we are gone.

- Do you lean towards ethics as a code or set of rules to act upon? Or towards ethics as a process of thoughtful deliberation and debate? Or towards meaningful action?
- Where would you like to go in your own exploration of environmental ethics?
- What kind of stories would you like to leave behind?

## Why don't people seem to care, part one?

Despite widespread concern about environmental issues and serious doubts

about whether we are on a path leading to sustainable societies, it often seems that collectively we are making very little progress. [But what holds us in this bubble of inertia?](#)

One way of looking at this is to recognize that the real authorities in our culture are assumptions embedded so deeply that they have become almost invisible. And it is these assumptions, whether we are aware of them or not, that shape our practices and the decisions that we make. This seems especially true for those working in modernist, globalized, westernized, Eurocentric, neo-liberal, colonial, Cartesian, and/or anthropocentric-oriented cultures.

When we think about environmental issues, we are also being constantly bombarded by the dominant imagery, assumptions, and cultural practices, and all alien thinking is bent back to the beliefs, values, and rationality of the status quo. They are often embedded in the words that we use, our metaphors, daily practices, and even what officially counts as knowledge and rationality. It isn't that people don't care; it seems that we can increasingly slip into conformism and a collective unconsciousness.

We find this in language that inherently sees the world as a human commodity. For example, flowers are for humans to enjoy rather than being respected for their intrinsic worth. Metaphors in advertising, and even school curricula, present the natural world as a playground or as a resource to be extracted. Or economies

**"Looking at ethics in a more expansive way can often release us from the burden of attempting to come up with a single correct answer and offer us, instead, practical ways to move ethically-forward in life, one step at a time."**

Bob Jickling



are assumed to be ever-growing entities. And, in educational practices, content is primarily abstracted from the real world and these abstractions are presented in classrooms. This is the way things have always been done, and to be “sensible” is to comply.

When we wonder why ethics isn’t an everyday activity for most of society, we need to consider that the cultural milieu is hostile to this task.

- How can we recognize culture-centred habits of language, metaphors, and practices and respond to the urges to conform to “business as usual”?
- Where was I able to disrupt everyday consumerist language and metaphors and replace them with ones that are more eco-friendly?
- How can I enable real world encounters with the more-than-human world? How can I make barriers between classroom learning and outside learning more permeable?

## Why don’t people seem to care, part two?

The American conservationist Aldo Leopold [1966] laid out the groundwork for tackling this question long ago: “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” [p. 251]. We need to pay attention to this.

Anthony Weston adds that Western cultures seem increasingly committed to disconnection from the rest of the world.

Indeed, citizens are often physically “protected” from the larger living world—barricaded by classrooms, climate-controlled homes, malls, and increasingly online shopping, computers, cell phones, and social media platforms. Consequently, they don’t feel themselves as part of larger living systems. For Weston, this insistent and felt disconnection “is not the root of the environmental crisis, but most fundamentally, is the very crisis itself” [2004, p. 33].

The threads running through these ideas are that feelings, emotions, and presence in the world are important, and these threads continue through to contemporary posthumanism. Conversations have swirled around words like: identification with others, empathy, care, proximity, and intimacy. [4]

Sadly, in “rationalist” cultures, concern about feelings is typically underrepresented or absent. It falls outside dominant norms, and there are always pressures to bend the will of imaginative educators back into the normative fold.

Nevertheless, as Arjen Wals said years ago, “what you can’t measure still exists” [1996]. Taking this idea seriously will require reconnecting with those places that we can love and have faith in.

- Have I found myself marginalizing feelings and emotions in favour of prescribed learning outcomes that are more easily measured? What could I do differently?
- Did my students have an opportunity today to engage directly with a larger living world?



- How can I enable encounters with communities in the spaces that my students co-inhabit? And how can we ensure these encounters are acknowledged?

## Where does the moral impulse arise?

If ethics are effectively what we do, then theorizing will be meaningless unless action is taken. This introduces the question: Where does the impulse to take action arise?

Concerns about this moral impulse have been around for some time. For example, Zigmunt Bauman [1993] argues that moral codes erode moral impulses by reducing our responsibilities to work out our own moral actions. [Arne Næss's \[1988\] alternative to duty-driven ethics entails being intimate in the world.](#) With this kind of positioning, we can develop a larger sense of Self to include relationships in the world. We and our places converge, and impulses to act will more naturally arise through intimacy, proximity, sensitivity, compassion, and identification with these places

- How can I nurture my own immersion in places? How can I enable my students to do the same?
- Can we, together, recognize that ever-growing intimacy and meaningful relationship building will take time?

## Can ethics be joyful?

When Næss looked for a fresh starting place, not dependent upon duties, he drew upon Immanuel Kant's distinction between moral acts and beautiful acts. [For him, moral acts arising from duty and](#)



Photo credit: Bob Jickling

[compelled by guilt often require sacrificing personal interests for some abstract greater good. Whereas doing something because of a positive inclination is a beautiful act.](#)

So, if we willingly act out self-identification and empathy for coinhabiting beings and places, we have taken a beautiful act. When contrasted with duty and guilt, this can indeed be joyous.

This is, of course, not a superficial joy that can be equated with self-interested happiness. [Rather, it is a more the profound joy arising from feeling that we are intrinsically inclined to act in our right way.](#)

- Can you imagine joy arising through the action of moral choices?
- How can I create conditions for spontaneous, joyful action to arise?

## Can ethics arise through lived experience?

If ethics are what people do, can we then ask, does what we do also help shape our ethics? This line of questioning suggests that there is room—and indeed a need—for much more imaginative and experimental approaches.



Returning to Leopold, he provocatively wrote that, “nothing so important as an ethic is ever ‘written” (1966, p. 263). Ethics is a constantly evolving process where participants are engaged in the reworking of relationships between themselves and “the land.” He eschewed presumptions of a “true” or “final” ethic.

Similarly, Anthony Weston (1992, 1994) argues environmental ethics needs a long period of experimentation. [Our task is to create conceptual, experiential, and psychological space for our students—that is the freedom to move, think, and experiment in daily environmental practices.](#) And in these everyday activities, new environmental values can arise.

- What environmental practices are you trying?
- What are your students doing? Have you given them the freedom to experiment? To go beyond, even, your own best actions?

## Educere

I hope this is not the end, but a beginning. Or, in the spirit of the Latin root for education, educere, it is an invitation to lead outwards and onwards. Engaging in ethics is daunting, yet I also hope that through an expanding collection of questions that you will find useful starting points. However, there are more questions to ask, and work to develop your own touchstones for practice. But hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up (Orr, 2011). The Earth Charter, alongside narratives in environmental ethics, are useful tools for getting this work done. But they are not the

final word in an evolving field. Keep going, and good luck!

## Notes:

[1] In the spirit of not bogging this essay down with excessive referencing, I acknowledge that throughout this paper I have drawn from an earlier paper (Jickling, 2004) and our book (Jickling et al., 2021). I am also indebted to John Ralston Saul for inspiring the idea of “ethics as an everyday activity” (Saul, 2001).

[2] Mirian Vilela is the Executive Director of the Earth Charter International.

[3] Use of the term “touchstones” is derived from our work on Wild Pedagogies (Jickling et al., 2018).

[4] For starters, I am thinking about Karen Warren (1990), Val Plumwood (1993), Jim Cheney (1989), and Nel Noddings (2002). There have been many more through to this posthuman era with Rosi Braidotti (2019) and colleagues. A particularly exciting development is unfolding in Jan Zwicky’s Lyric philosophy (2015, 2019).



Photo credit: Bob Jickling



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Our book, *Environmental ethics: A sourcebook for educators*, is available in hard copy on Amazon, but also as an open-source text on both Google Books:

[https://books.google.ca/books/about/Environmental\\_Ethics.html?id=CjtTEAAAQBAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.ca/books/about/Environmental_Ethics.html?id=CjtTEAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y)

And Research Gate:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356830923\\_Environmental\\_Ethics\\_BOOK\\_1\\_71121\\_Nov\\_17\\_2021](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356830923_Environmental_Ethics_BOOK_1_71121_Nov_17_2021)



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## **Embracing the Earth Charter: Journeys of Transformation, Cultivating Interbeing Through Ecological Awakening and Interconnectedness**



Silvia Ferrero

Silvia is an Earth Charter Educator and School Seal Verifier. She holds a PhD in Social Anthropology and leads Silvia Latham Consultancy, focusing on coaching and mentoring in eco-development. In 2023, she co-facilitated courses for the EC Online Certificate on ESD. As a guest speaker at Canterbury Christ Church University, she introduced Sustainability and the Earth Charter into the curriculum. Silvia works with private and corporate clients, and students, promoting Earth Charter principles to enhance eco-development and personal growth.





In this article, I would like to share some reflections on my journey of epistemological transformation, as an anthropologist, transformational coach, and Earth Charter Educator for Sustainable Development, and illustrate a few transformative pedagogical initiatives and actions that followed.

I came across the Earth Charter during one of the most difficult times of my life. Participating in the Earth Charter International online certificate programme on Education for Sustainable Development in 2021 opened the path to a new sense of fulfilment and professional regeneration. I immediately felt a deep bond with the Earth Charter and that its words, values, and principles were deeply rooted in my being. The more I studied it, acted upon it, talked about it, and shared it, the more it remained in my system. It was life giving. I soon realized that the Earth Charter is a live document that inspires and ignites deep transformation, and I became determined to share its vitality in my personal and professional life.

The Earth Charter also changed my epistemology. Its distinctive vision of the world community [Earth Charter Commission, 2000], [widened my anthropological understanding of our interbeing and interconnectedness with all life forms and became a milestone in my new way of conceiving our diverse relations amongst ourselves, all living beings, and Life. The Earth Charter enriched my knowledge of the 'mystery of being' in ways that touched my heart and intellectual curiosity.](#)

For example, the course consolidated an intuition, which I had left dormant for years, that we are deeply connected to nature in different ways. The Earth Charter education programme gave a name to that connection with the definition of ecological wisdom. In simple words, we have a deeply ingrained ecological wisdom that stems from our intrinsic relationship with nature, both physical and spiritual, and that reveals our interconnectedness and interbeing with the living world. It is our inner ecological wisdom that prompts us to deepen our relationships with and nurture respect for the community of life. It is our inner ecological wisdom that testifies to the nature of our interbeing with the whole community of life on Earth. With the Earth Charter course, I experienced an ecological awakening that enriched my being and confirmed that our roots to nature are indeed a vital part of our own existence.

The Earth Charter also added a missing link to my professional understanding of the 'community' aspect of our being, that invaluable element that we all have as humans, 'which brings persons to encompass more than themselves by opening them up to others and society' [PRH-International, 2007, p. 276]. As human beings, we are born with a healthy inclination to grow and nurture our capacity to socialise and live harmoniously amongst ourselves. The Earth Charter adds to the community dimension of our being the element of our intrinsic interconnectedness with nature as a building block. If we want to live our social dimension harmoniously, we cannot



separate ourselves from nature. We cannot rely solely on our social interactions to enhance the growth dynamism of our being [1]. Our interconnectedness with the Earth is a substantial element of the community element of our being [Earth Charter Commission, 2000].

Unfortunately, some of us have come to disregard this important element of our being, blinded by the pursuit of profit and power to the detriment of the Earth and humanity. The lack of respect and care for the Earth and life in all its diversity, as advocated in Pillar I of the Earth Charter [Earth Charter Commission, 2000], is, ultimately, a sign of a consistent denial and disrespect that some of us display towards themselves of our inner nature, ecological wisdom and interbeing with the Earth. It is the denial of the fact that, as humans, we need to nurture our interconnectedness with nature for our healthy growth and life.

I worked in the field of personal growth for many years, drawing my epistemology and anthropological understanding of human beings from my doctoral studies and research in anthropology, professional development as a coach and, above all, the PRH method [2], a pedagogy of personal growth, founded by André Rochais.

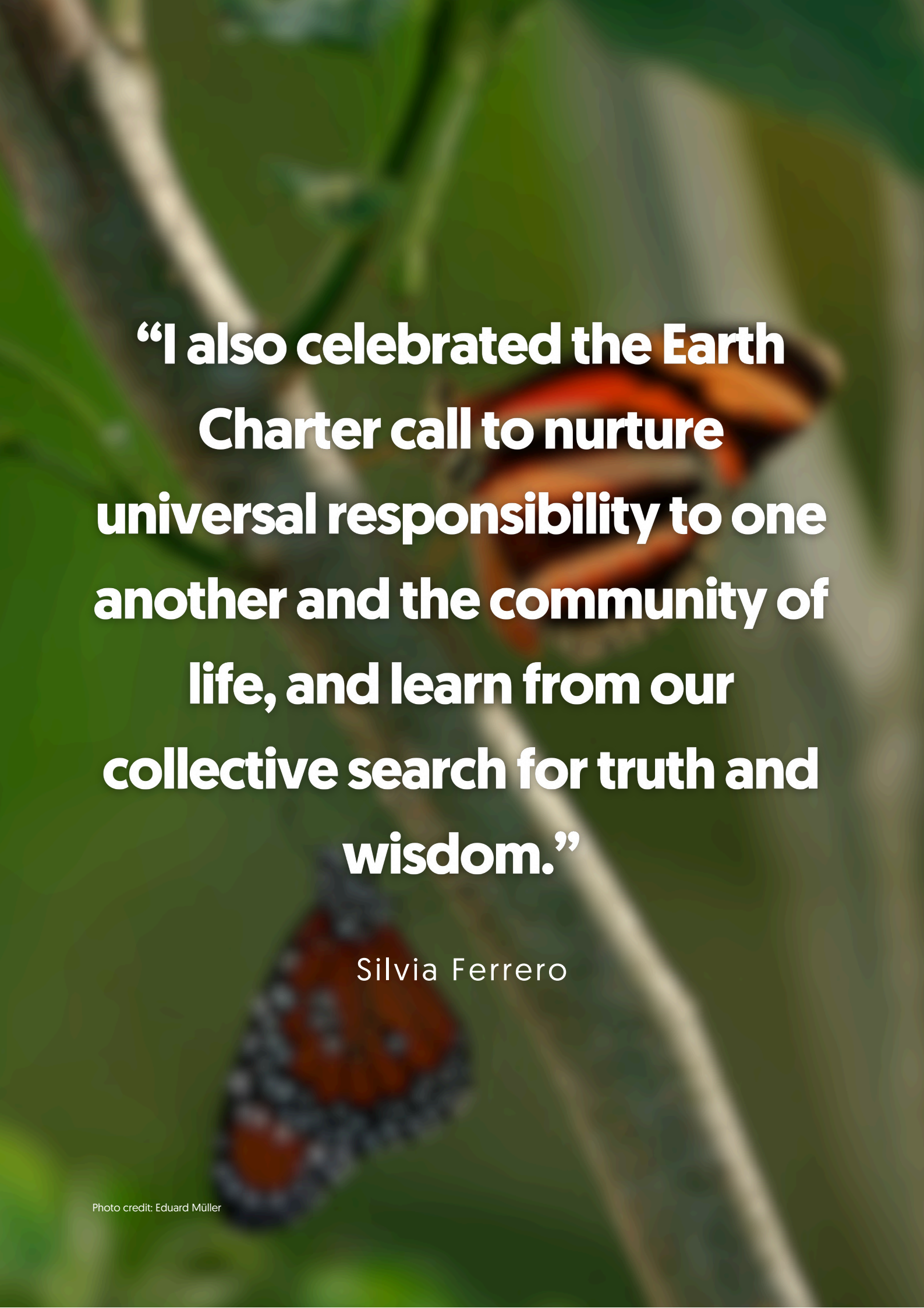
André Rochais loved to describe himself as ‘an ordinary man, born into an ordinary family’ [Rouyer, 1994, p.3]. His definition of ‘ordinary person’ was intended to become a humble example of the wonderment towards the creations and endeavours that

we are all capable of, when we are truly open to our inner being and when we are connected to our deep conscience [3]. That is the inner voice we refer to that guides us in our discernment before we take actions [PRH International 2007]. For André Rochais, growth and real change could only occur from within [Rouyer, 1994, p.3].

I felt in awe when I read in the Preamble of the Earth Charter that ‘when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more’ [Earth Charter Commission, 2000]. To my knowledge, the Earth Charter was the first and probably the only official international document on sustainability that acknowledged and recognised the importance of growth in the being as an essential, constitutive element for a peaceful conviviality in the human family and the Earth community. I also celebrated the Earth Charter call to nurture universal responsibility to one another and the community of life, and learn from our collective search for truth and wisdom.



Photo credit: Eduard Müller



**“I also celebrated the Earth  
Charter call to nurture  
universal responsibility to one  
another and the community of  
life, and learn from our  
collective search for truth and  
wisdom.”**

Silvia Ferrero



I believe that every human being has the capacity to evolve and fulfil themselves for the good of humanity and Creation. This happens when we embrace and nurture love, compassion, integrity, coherence, inner freedom, respect for our deep intuitions, other people, our natural surroundings and much more. Above all, this mostly happens when we listen to and act in faith to our deep conscience. With the Earth Charter, I realised that deep conscience and ecological wisdom are two sides of the same coin. They complement each other in their pivotal role to help us discern and act in healthy and respectful ways for ourselves, others and the whole of the life community. For years, I witnessed in my clients the growth impact of positive self-awareness and its different manifestations through self-love, self-respect, self-forgiveness, self-acceptance. As claimed in subprinciple 16f of the Earth Charter, real change starts from within, when we develop the right relationships with ourselves first [4].

With all this in mind, I embarked on a new journey of exploration and professional transformation. I envisioned the possibility to humbly contribute to the paradigmatic changes advocated by the Earth Charter by promoting transformative pedagogical experiences and actions. I endorsed the Earth Charter notions of interbeing, interconnectedness and ecological wisdom. I welcomed the idea that creative thinking, imagination and our ability to pause and listen to our inner world were a good start to help people change their perceptions of the world and experience their connection with nature. I envisioned

myself as a discrete agent, an ordinary woman acting amongst a multitude of ordinary people amid webs of relations that unite us all in the purpose and common goals for the good of the human family and the Earth community.

One of the amazing consequences and benefits of transformational pedagogies is that through art, by which I mean all kinds of creative artistic activities, in its various expressions and manifestations, and through the direct participation of people in transformational activities, we can challenge the shared assumptions, values, and practices of hegemonic narratives. We can solicit deep change and awaken the growth dynamism of people. Art has the ability to inspire actions, revisit cultural assumptions and catalyse social change. The poetry inscribed in the words and values of the Earth Charter are an inspiring work of art that ignites transformation. Let me give a few examples.

For two consecutive years, I introduced the concept of the 'social responsibility' of products as part of my introduction of the Earth Charter to the second-year undergraduate students of an Engineering and Design course. I wanted students to become aware that when we analyse a product life cycle, we must include an analysis of the possible social consequences of utilising certain components, elements, and minerals to make a product. I used the example of a 'cup of coffee' as their final product to analyse. I wanted students to become aware that growing and selling coffee, up to its final consumption, can have



Photo credit: Eduard Müller

unsustainable consequences not only for the environment but also for those involved in the production and commercialisation of coffee.

I asked students to draw creative diagrams and pictures, with colours and symbols, of the links between some unsustainable aspects of the different phases of production, commercialisation and consumption of coffee and the relevant principles and sub-principles of the Earth Charter that challenged those elements of the processes. The exercise certainly expanded students' capacity to apply system thinking. It increased their understanding of global interdependence and the damaging consequences of decisions taken without applying 'the vision of a sustainable way of life, locally, nationally, regionally and globally', as expressed in the Way Forward of the Earth Charter (Earth Charter Commission, 2000). However, above all, I sensed that the creative process of drawing the links with colours and symbols enabled students to internalise the human experiences of those involved in the different phases of coffee

production, commercialisation, and consumption. It increased their appreciation of the notion of interconnectedness for effective change and sustainability.

Art can evoke emotional responses that transcend cultural and ideological barriers. The poetry of the words and values voiced in the Earth Charter document and their vitality touch people's hearts and souls. Bonds can be revealed when we listen to our inner world while engaging with art. With this in mind, I challenged a group of secondary school students with a transformative exercise. I asked them to read the Preamble of the Earth Charter by pacing it and synchronising it with a piece of music played by violinist Ray Chen [5]. This was indeed a challenge. However, I sensed that the process of synchronizing the movements of the music with the tones, words, and meanings of the Preamble opened students' hearts to the live words of the Earth Charter. I felt that to create a synaesthetic connection by anchoring the Preamble to a piece of music had inspired them to integrate its



values. For most students, the exercise was indeed vitalising and life giving.

The Earth Charter also transcends cultural and ideological barriers and evokes emotional responses. Poet Steve Walker dedicated a poem to the Earth Charter, 21st Century Blues. He read it at a social event in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, UK, April 2023, where his guitarist friend, Steve Antony, also played it.

## 21st Century Blues

Tonight they sing the Charter, backed by orchestra and band.  
Yes, tonight they sing the Charter, backed by orchestra and band -  
The Earth Charter, while the sands of time are streaming through our hands.

No more violence, no discrimination, peace!  
There'll be no more violence, no discrimination, peace!  
Mother Nature sings Earth songs, opening our hearts, our release.

But I'm just an ol' geezer, a dreamy ol' geezer,  
And I haven't got long.

I think of my children, think of my grandchild  
Now I think of my children, think of my grandchild -  
They need a world to love in, a world that celebrates all that is wild.

Oxygen bonds with carbon, rises like a crow leaves a skeleton tree.  
Oxygen bonds with carbon, rises like a crow leaves a skeleton tree  
A shadow over the world, over you, and over me.

But I'm just an ol' geezer, a dreamy ol' geezer,  
And I haven't got long.

Let's fight now, together, for this planet our home.  
Let's fight now, together, for this place we belong -  
But let's hurry, because we haven't got long.

I'm just an ol' geezer, a dreamy ol' geezer, and I haven't got long.  
I'm just an ol' geezer, may be an ol' geezer, but we haven't got long.

At the art exhibition 'Our Planet: Celebration and Concern' organised by local Friends of the Earth in September 2023, I exhibited The Tree of Life, an artwork I drew inspired by the Earth Charter.

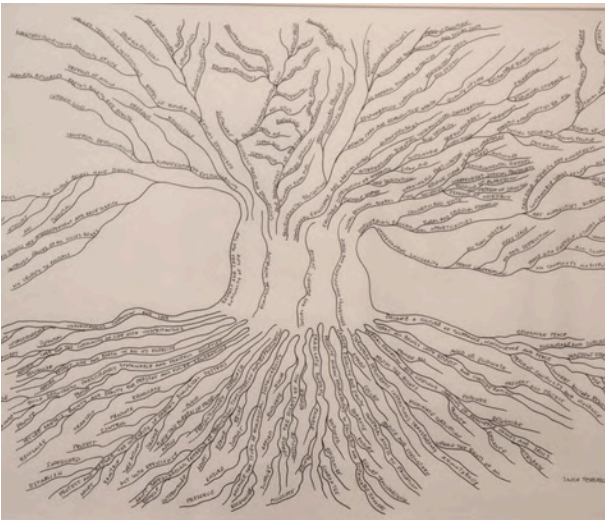


Photo credit: Silvia Ferrero

The Tree of Life is a metaphorical representation of the synergies and vitality expressed in the values and principles of the Earth Charter. It is an imaginary projection of the beautiful outcomes that values and principles can produce when they are firmly grounded and in operation. I explained that the roots of The Tree of Life build on the calls for action voiced in the subprinciples of the four pillars of the Earth Charter, while its small roots are the constructive and proactive verbs mentioned in the subprinciples. The sap passing through the roots strengthens the trunk, that represents the four pillars, and gives it energy and life, resulting in a beautiful explosion of branches and leaves, which sum up the actions advocated by the subprinciples of the Earth Charter. Branches and leaves flourish thanks to the strenuous work of the roots. The intricacies of the branches, the trunk, and the roots represent the deep ecology and the ecological system of the Earth Charter. I suggested that, like The Tree of Life, if we ground ourselves in our values with coherence and inner freedom and listen to our deep conscience and ecological freedom, we too can flourish. We, too, can

act for the good of the human family and the Earth community.

I explained about ecological wisdom and our interconnectedness with nature in a recent talk at the Verdi Theatre in Padua, Italy, as part of a two-day Awareness Festival, which focused on 'Connections'. In my talk *The Wisdom of Nature is Connection* (see [The wisdom of nature is connection – English subtitles \(youtube.com\)](#))



Photo credit: Silvia Ferrero

I challenged the audience to change their gaze, their ways of perceiving nature, in the specific case of trees. I showed photos that I took of trees with beautiful branches, and roots and bark of different shapes and colours. I wanted to awaken the audience to a new dimension of our interconnectedness with nature. I explained that we can learn from the shapes and personal histories of trees, and I suggested that trees can be a reflection of our own qualities. We can mirror ourselves in trees and learn from them at the same time. I showed how we can resonate with their shapes and space, for



trees can make us feel alive with a new energy that is regenerative. Their shape can inspire tenacity, compassion, solidarity, cooperation, flexibility, courage, resilience, and much more. Qualities that we urgently need in human life. With that talk, [I wanted to recalibrate human beings' place in nature and shed light on a different aspect of our interbeing with it.](#)

I am now working on a photographic book, with the vision of taking readers through a transformational journey and coaching them to their ecological awakening by engaging with the shapes of trees. My book will be dedicated to the vitality of the Earth Charter and its values.

These are just a few examples of the beautiful actions that the Earth Charter is prompting us to do thanks to its vitality, powerful words and values. [We, in turn, need to grow in our being and connect to our deep conscience and ecological wisdom.](#)

## Notes

[1] The dynamism of growth is the 'innate irrepressible strength which impels persons consciously or subconsciously to actualize their potentialities.' [PRH-International, 2007, p. 277].

[2] PRH stands for Personnalité et Relations Humaines – Personality and Human Relations. See PRH-International <https://www.prh-international.org/>

[3] According to the PRH method, '... the deep conscience is a place of synthesis and serves as an internal reference to discern what is in line with our inner being and its fulfilment.' [PRH-International, 2007, p. 114]

[4] Subprinciple 16f of Pillar IV of the Earth Charter says: 'Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.' Earth Charter Commission, (2000), The Earth Charter.

[5] The piece of music lasted 4.33 minutes. It was Koncz/Satie, A new Satiesfaction [featuring Gymnopédie n. 1] in Ray Chen, The Golden Age, Decca.

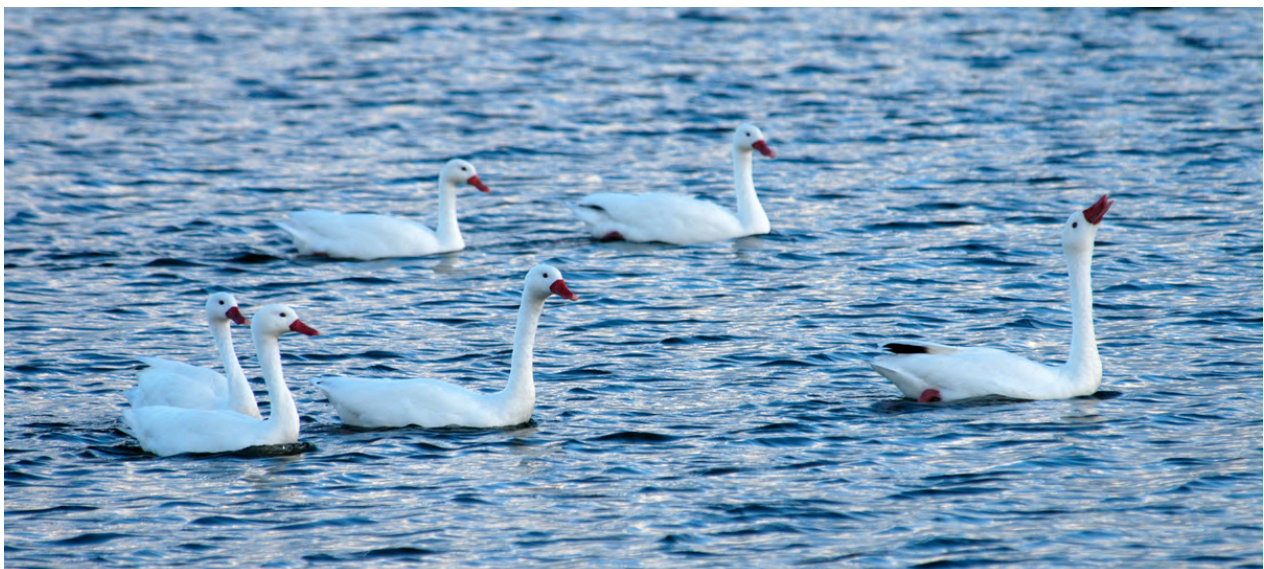


Photo credit: Eduard Müller





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Photo credit: Getty Images

## Establishing a Sociocultural Approach to Philosophy for Children in a Marginalised Educational Context



John Bhurekeni

John (PhD) is a postdoctoral fellow at the Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University, South Africa. John developed a decolonial approach to philosophy for children that expanded primary school children’s critical reflexive thinking skills and teachers’ capability for creatively engaging heritage-based curriculum. His research interest is in the fields of philosophy for children, global citizenship education, and education for sustainable development as they apply in primary school education contexts in Africa and the Global South.



## Introduction

In retrospect, I never anticipated that the work I was doing with parents, teachers, education inspectors, and children would earn me the South African Education Research Association's best PhD award in 2023. The study on which I am reflecting was done as a PhD by publication, which entails the publication of papers along with their orientation and interpretation. Its main focus was on 'Exploring aspects of community of inquiry (COI) in Afrophilia learning processes for transformative education using an Afrophilic 'philosophy for children' approach'.

Growing up in a small village in Zimbabwe's Chirumanzu District in the 1980s, I attended school where I had to adhere to the restricting limits of a restrictive and narrowly framed curriculum inherited from the colonial government. My formal schooling experiences were far removed from my everyday experiences at home, including the life skills I and my childhood acquaintances learned while herding cattle with our uncle Matunha. Even though minor curriculum reforms were done during my schooling days,



The author during one of his back-to-school visits to town in the 1990s, just before the new school year began. It was typical for children in my village to travel to town at least once throughout the school year. Photo credit: John Bhurekeni

I had to continuously learn how to navigate my way in-between these two disconnections until after graduating from teachers' college with a teaching diploma.

For over 17 years, as a primary school teacher with a specialization in environmental science education and philosophy, I have worked to integrate philosophy for children and environmental science into my teaching practice in order to promote reflexive critical thinking. Through my research work, I have intentionally made use of stories, specifically traditional stories from Southern Africa or Zimbabwe, to enter in the philosophical perspective through our living heritage practices/ culture, and the results have shown that Afrophilia reflexive artefacts (as I called them) make learning relevant to the learners' life world. Teaching philosophy from a theoretical and abstract approach has never been part of our teaching because it produces a disjunction between our real-life social values and norms and those that are already embedded in theory.

One of the most typical questions I encounter at academic conferences, where I advance the visibility of my work, is how to define Afrophilia. What I would like to admit in this article, as I have on many other occasions, is that Afrophilia, as I understand it, is interdisciplinary, and as such, it has become so expansive and heterogeneous that it defies definition as a love for Africa. Thus, Afrophilia foundations in the study are regarded as "the discourses that are the medium of philosophical reflexion" (Rettova, 2004, p. 4) in each African society.



Children at one of the Sebakwe primary schools fetching drinking water from an open water source for their teachers. Photo Credit: John Bhurekeni

Those who were able to read some of the previous articles I wrote related to my doctoral research are aware that I presented such discourses to include African proverbs, poems, stories, music, and folktales, all of which are useful in the initiation of philosophical engagements with children in a community of inquiry approach.

Set in an intensely underprivileged educational context, that of resettlement schools in Sebakwe, Zimbabwe, my work with children was driven by a strong desire to see a more empowered learner with the know-hows, skills, and competencies that allow them to function and thrive in their society. Much of the photographic evidence documented in the study, as illustrated by the picture above, evolved the theme of abjection.

In Zimbabwe, the discourse of abjection by race in education was replaced in 1980 [at the attainment of political

independence] by a focus on equal access to educational opportunities [Bhurekeni, 2022]. Prior to 1980, Zimbabwe had two distinct educational systems, one for the imperial colonial masters and the other for the colonised black majority.

It is bizarre that forty-four years after independence, teachers and learners are subjected to conditions that make them uncomfortable, resulting in social abjection and a high disinterest in formal school education. However, such experiences of social abjection served as an essential foundation for mapping my study's decolonial turn and reinforcing the desire to succeed with the learners, teachers, and parents whom I worked with. To accomplish this, I utilised an approach to teaching and learning known as philosophy for children, which has the potential to help learners to develop an improved understanding of life's big questions and co-construct meaning from the content they learn [Lipman, 2003].



In my study, I explained that there are already two well-established generations of Philosophy for Children (P4C), and I reaffirmed that my research constitutes one of those aimed at describing the emergence of the third generation. This is because, during the initial stages of the Philosophy for Children programme, the Institute of the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) produced only one curriculum (Lipman, 2003). A common feature across the three generations established to date is that philosophy cannot be force-fed to people; they must be 'delighted' in doing it, and as a result, the curriculum has been designed to present philosophy in a dialogical manner, in which teaching and learning occur in tandem (Goering, Shudak, & Wartenberg, 2013). The third generation Philosophy for Children curriculum with which I am working, in the idea of decolonial futures as it emphasizes development of diversity in reasoning in heritage-based contexts for purposes of making sure that children develop a strong sense of identity and competences in contexts that are relevant to their life worlds.



Kudu, a common wildlife animal in the Sebakwe area, but now under threat as most people hunt it for meat. Photo credit: Getty Images.

The search for an education system that is relevant to the learner's life world via the implementation of a P4C educational intervention demonstrates how P4C influences 'possibilities of more meaningful times ahead'. Finding meaningful times is one of the obstacles of postcolonial societies, because at the moment, "we live in the present historical conjuncture" (Reynolds, 2009, p. 20), that is politicized, and our learning institutions are ideological market places.

## A look at the Zimbabwean Curriculum

A critical observation that I made during my study was that the Zimbabwean schools' curriculum, like other southern African countries, is influenced by historical fragmentations of a colonial past that only allowed learners to practice their own culture within the framework of the imperial colonial structure. This unconscious misalignment of the Zimbabwean education praxis including its philosophical underpinnings, I argued, demonstrates how vestiges of colonial rule are still shaping the education sector leaving it to focus mainly on abstracted concepts with continued marginalization of local cultures, discourses, and knowledge (Bhurkeni, 2020). Paradoxically, postcolonial reforms continue to miss the point, as they are anchored not only on continuities of coloniality but also on superficiality and doxa, which translates into exclusion of epistemic depth.



The Zimbabwean education curriculum therefore is still in need of counterhegemonic options that will help address the persistent curriculum issues, and more importantly, create time and space for engaging and listening to children's voices. Child(ren) and children's voices are complex concepts that invite education thinkers and educators to focus on developing an educational curriculum that goes beyond children's verbal perspectives to include their non-verbal communications, visual art, music, poetry, drawings, and imaginations. Work on searching for counterhegemonic options is well explained in my thesis chapter on decoloniality and postcolonial theory and also Bhurekeni (2020).

My approach to decoloniality in children's learning is motivated by the history of the word school, which in ancient Greek was known as *scholē* and meant leisure. Experience doing philosophy with children demonstrates that the vague boundaries between learning and leisure play into the hands of learning- an evolving and sophisticated activity that is prevalent in today's society, particularly in formal schooling. One of the parent-participants taught me a Shona proverb that says, 'Chikomo shata divi, rimwe ritambire pwere', which means that a rocky or steep slope may be unsuitable for play, emphasising the need for improving the curriculum in order to better accommodate the learning needs of children.

In my years as a professional primary school teacher, I have found that free-play

allows children to spend time investigating and thinking about things, which explains the link between leisure and learning, and eventually to a place of learning [school]. And this is what I desired for the children in the resettlement areas where I worked, so that instead of witnessing a culture of high learner disinterest in learning, they would develop an intense interest and desire to continue their education.

## The Resettlement Schools in Zimbabwe

Teaching in Zimbabwean resettlement schools entails encountering unique challenges and experiences. These schools, including the Sebakwe resettlement ones, were established at a point when the government was implementing a land reform program with minimal to no social facilities, including schools, clinics, access to clean drinking water, and a good road network.

In 2012, a Zimbabwean parliamentary committee acknowledged that infrastructure in resettlement schools was



A picture of children attending lessons at one of schools in the Sebakwe resettlement area. Photo credit: John Bhurekeni.



so poor that classrooms were predominantly converted tobacco barns and animal feeding houses, teachers' accommodation was scarce, and sanitation facilities were nearly non-existent. Despite these revelations, the government continues to pretend that everything is all right.

It was in the context of these schools that I situated an open and participant driven exploratory case study aimed at transformative curriculum development and learner's development of critical reflexive thinking. The Afrophilic P4C study was constructed using a four-phase data collection framework: Phase 1 - document analysis, Phase 2 - formative intervention workshops, Phase 3 - Philosophy for Children session observations, and Phase 4 - reflective interviews. Furthermore, analytical tools that allowed for rigour and distancing from the data and analysis process were developed. Since I was an insider-formative interventionist researcher, this allowed me to practise reflexivity and helped me regulate my own subjectivity.

As previously stated, the schools' curriculum is fragmented by the continuities of coloniality. To counter the resurgence of coloniality in my study, I kept myself aware of the three colonialities of power, knowledge, and being that could have affected my study, leading to processes of formulated 'thingfication' [Césaire, 2001]. The potential downside of

not addressing these forms of coloniality is that one will embrace thingfication processes and dehumanize their participants, which I did not want because my participants were already victims of social abjection.

### Some takeaway points from my study

Undoubtedly, selecting the most important takeaways from a thesis that has been prepared over a span of five years is an uphill struggle. As a result, in this article, I draw attention to those that have fascinated me and established a connection between myself as a researcher and Earth Charter researchers. Our shared interest evolved in a collaboration to explore heritage-activated learning approaches via storytelling.



The author sharing some of the key findings from his study with a group of teachers at an assessment with living heritage workshop in Namibia [March 2024].



Firstly, we noted that curriculum decolonization and transformation, as developed in my study, is a multi-voiced, multi-age-grouped approach. It involved an open and participant-driven methodological approach that foregrounds multi-voicedness in research and curriculum innovation practice. In line with this is the fact that, while there are similarities regarding decolonial aims and objectives, ultimately the meanings, actualization, and challenges of decolonizing the curriculum varied depending on the context.

The sociocultural framing used in the study supports bringing children's heritage and cultural lens to bear on curriculum and pedagogical praxis. As a way of example, storytelling, which is an integral part of the African community, including the Sebakwe resettlement area, plays a critical role in improving learner-agency and development of ethical-reasoning. [As demonstrated from stories told in my study, the stories that are told in the African context personify animal characters, but again they are aimed at transmitting the virtues valued by the society.](#) Learner-agency is improved as the children are expected to participate with the storyteller as they listen to these stories, as most of them include musical mimicking.

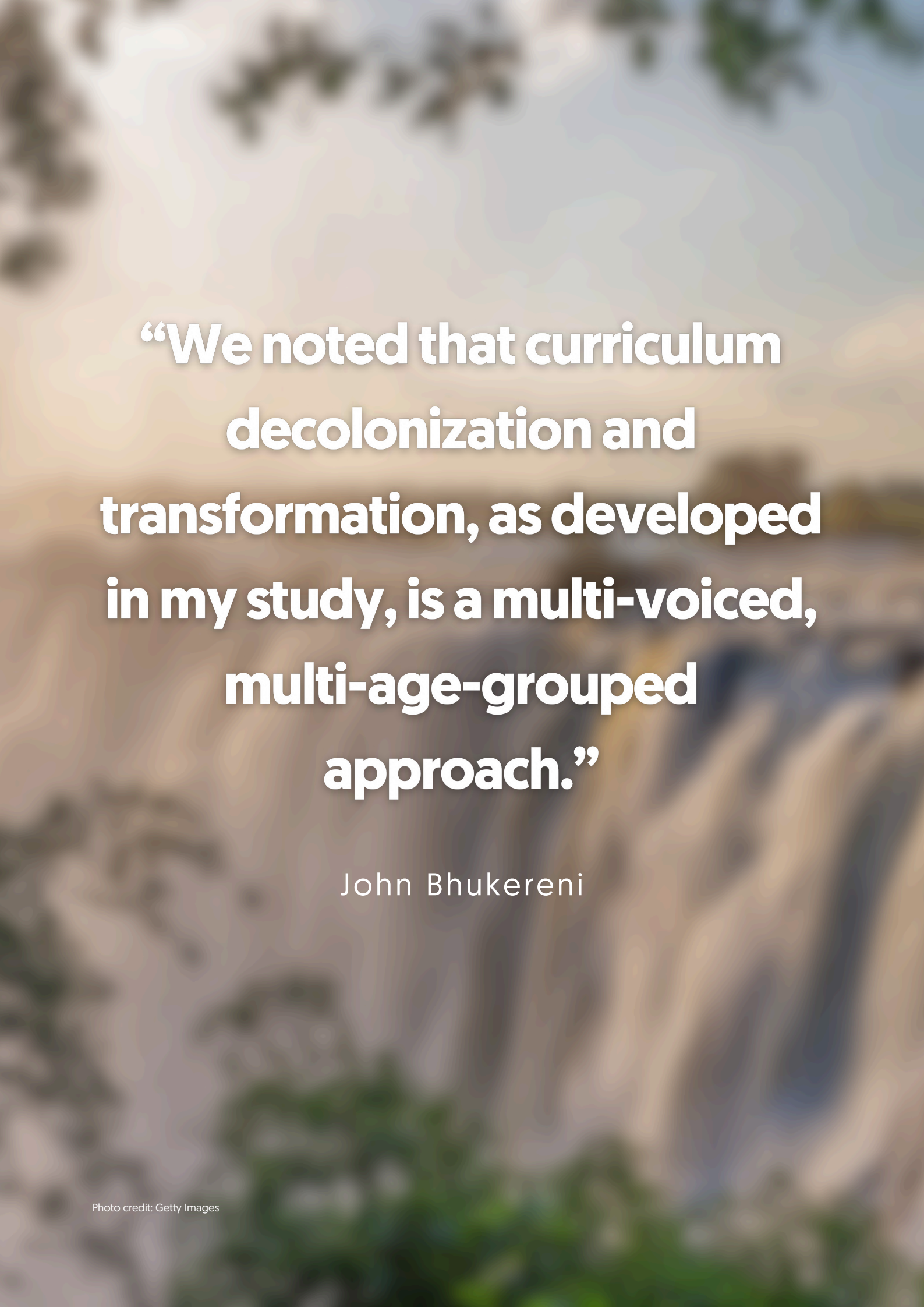
Finally, I'd like you, the reader, to understand that the reflections I have shared with you are not my own. They are reflections on the people's decolonial initiatives to educate their children.

I confidently joined the journey and developed a decolonial approach to philosophy for children, which expanded primary school children's critical reflexive thinking skills and teachers' ability to creatively engage heritage-based curriculum. This is essentially because teachers, children, and parents were actively involved in selecting the most significant Afrophilia living heritage knowledge for integration in a philosophy for children curriculum.



The Great Zimbabwe Monuments are one of the most frequently visited heritage sites by schools in Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Getty Images





**“We noted that curriculum  
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John Bhukerani



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Author in 2014 with a group of Early Childhood Development (ECD) children on the day of the graduation. This marks their entry into main stream primary school grade one level.



Photo credit: Eduard Müller

## **I Want to Provide People with Opportunities to Learn How to Live More Sustainably. Where Should I Start?**



Erika Reinkendorf

Erika is an economist with over 8 years of experience in managing educational projects in non-profit organizations and collaborating with the public sector in Peru. She is known for her commitment to the sustainable development of vulnerable communities. Currently, she is completing a master's degree in Responsible Management and Sustainable Economic Development at the University for Peace in Costa Rica, where she is developing a documentary on the implementation of sustainability principles in Costa Rican schools as part of her graduation project in collaboration with the Earth Charter.



Instituto Alajuela. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

After working for over 8 years in the education sector, I started to wonder what the next step in my professional career would be. I realized that the challenges presented by the modern world are not being directly addressed by educational systems. How can we educate a generation of citizens who do not normalize wars, who know and fall in love with the idea of living in harmony with nature, and who can adapt to highly changing conditions? These concerns led me to pursue a master's degree in Responsible Management and Sustainable Economic Development at the University for Peace in Costa Rica. My curiosity and passion for education led me to take the Education for Sustainability course, which opened my eyes to a completely new world for me.

### Where did this curiosity lead me?

The course allowed me to understand the origin and need for the concept of sustainability and to analyze the worldview and values that support it. I learned about policies that are driving educational systems towards sustainability. We also investigated various pedagogies that, even before this concept was promoted, already fostered sustainable practices but have unfortunately not yet deeply permeated educational systems, remaining as alternative proposals on the periphery of more traditional education. Finally, I became familiar with practical examples of schools where education for sustainability is being implemented.

And that's where I found the first answers to my concerns: I understood that there are already educational institutions in the world

**“How can we educate a generation of citizens who do not normalize wars, who know and fall in love with the idea of living in harmony with nature, and who can adapt to highly changing conditions?”**

Erika Reinkendorf



whose goals include promoting sustainable development, not only among their students, but throughout the entire educational community. That inspired me to want to learn more. In the course, we had already visited a school that has the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) very present in their learning sessions, and we had read about other cases of schools that apply a whole-institution approach, promoted by UNESCO [1]. That motivated me to want to visit them, see up close how they are doing it, find out if it is possible to apply it in diverse contexts, and find ways to inspire other educational institutions to lose their fear and dare to innovate in the face of the challenges of our times.

I asked our professor Mirian if she could put me in contact with some schools in Costa Rica that she knew were implementing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). She agreed to do so and suggested I record the interviews and make a documentary to share these stories. Thus, I embarked on this journey of discovering the beginning of an educational revolution from 6 schools of different sizes, both private and public, in



CEUNA. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

rural and urban settings, which are transforming their educational institutions to incorporate sustainability principles in a comprehensive manner, from curriculum and pedagogy to infrastructure, governance, and their relationship with the surrounding community, with the intention of not only teaching what sustainability is but living it day by day.

### What did I find?

The first school I visited was the Centro Educativo Universitario Para Niños y Adolescentes (CEUNA), a private school in an urban environment with approximately 150 students from preschool to secondary school, characterized by its educational offer focused on Sustainable Human Development. More than 30 years ago, the school was founded in a former mechanical workshop with almost no vegetation around. After a few years, the directors decided to go through a consultation process where children were asked to imagine their ideal school, and they said they wanted a school with green areas and opportunities to learn outdoors. Thus, in 2000, they made a great effort to take out a loan to buy land that had been a coffee farm, where the campus is now located next to a large forest, which is also part of the school.

As part of their educational proposal, each grade in preschool and primary school is responsible for an environmental project throughout the year. For example, the school has a small farm with chickens and another space for turtles, both cared for by the students; other grades are in charge of



the Mundo en Miniatura project, where they study the insects found in the forest and the hydroponic garden, which grows vegetables that will later be consumed in the school cafeteria. In secondary school, projects are also carried out, led by groups of students from different grades who choose where they will participate throughout the year based on their own interests. The idea is that after going through all the grades, young people become guardians of the environment. Sustainability is part of the school's DNA, and is reflected in their daily life, thanks to the incorporation of the Earth Charter principles as a fundamental part of their philosophy.



CEUNA. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

Then I arrived at La Joya public school, which felt like a dream in a rural area among the mountains. The school has fewer than 50 students, between preschool and primary school, and is a model school where the director has taken the SDGs and Earth Charter principles as inspiration and guidance, and today opens its doors for educators and students from other schools to visit and learn from their experience. In 2018, in collaboration with the municipality, they acquired the

adjoining land and built an ecological park with fruit trees, farm animals, and a garden, which is a source of learning opportunities and where much of the food consumed by the students in the cafeteria is produced.

This school takes advantage of the resources offered by the rural environment and the knowledge of community members. For example, parents helped plant trees in the park, and mothers volunteered to maintain it. They also organize events such as ecological walks, reforestation and recycling campaigns, and karaoke dances to raise awareness in the community and raise funds to help implement and maintain the various initiatives within the school. Finally, thanks to the formation of alliances, they have received support from various institutions such as universities and private companies, whose contributions allow them to expand the resources available in the ecological park.



Escuela la Joya. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf



Escuela la Joya. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

The third school I visited was Humboldt-Schule, a German international school with students from preschool to secondary school. This is a private urban educational institution with funding and certain guidelines from Germany, with a focus oriented towards sciences without neglecting the humanistic orientation. Interestingly, children have philosophy classes from the 1st grade and learn to question and develop critical thinking from an early age. They are also given space to organize actions led by themselves, such as talks on topics of interest to them or fundraising campaigns to donate to different causes they decide to support.

Humboldt's sustainability initiative, like the other schools interviewed, is motivated by the Costa Rican government's Ecological Blue Flag Programme [2]. For several consecutive years, they have achieved the five stars, which is the highest recognition of the programme by implementing environmental management and education actions. However, they do not want to stop

at the 5 stars but seek to go further and involve students and school staff in the process. For example, as a result of the Earth Charter online certificate attended by the coordinators of the school's Environment and Blue Flag committees, they are implementing a change agents club where primary school students will receive support to put into practice initiatives that drive environmental and social changes.



Humboldt-Schule. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf





The next school I visited, Escuela José Cubero Muñoz, is a classic public school in an urban area with some budget constraints and some restrictions from having to comply with Ministry of Education guidelines, such as not being able to easily organize educational trips. Even so, they have also received 5 stars on the Blue Flag Programme and are part of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network [3]. Both networks serve as a guide and source of inspiration for the school, as they can learn about good practices shared by other educational associated institutions.

Some of the practices they have implemented, thanks to the Blue Flag Programme's momentum, include rainwater harvesting, as it is an abundant resource at certain times of the year; recycling plastic, paper, and glass, which are the most generated waste in the school; and including environmental education transversally in different school projects. Besides environmental issues, they also seek to include traditional Costa Rican culture and indigenous communities in different subjects.



Escuela Jose Cubero Muñoz. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

On the other hand, the Alajuela Institute is also a public educational center in an urban environment with approximately 2,100 students, which has modern infrastructure and large green spaces. This is also part of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, which allows them to receive training, learn from other experiences, and feel supported along the way. For example, this year, they want to implement a Mother Earth classroom, where they seek to recognize nature as a teacher. This is thanks to an initiative led by the Asociación para la Niñez y su Ambiente (ANIA), which, in collaboration with UNESCO, helps schools create spaces where students can form a close bond with nature.

At the Alajuela Institute, young people are also empowered to suggest and organize actions managed by themselves. A few months ago, they conducted a campaign to plant 200 trees, led by the student council, involving many students from all over secondary school. In that process, the students managed to form an alliance with the University of Costa Rica, through which they received the donation of trees and advice on which species would be best for reforesting the area. The University also committed to maintaining the trees over the next few years.

Finally, I arrived at San Francisco de Peñas Blancas, an exemplary public school with preschool and primary students that began very small with only 2 classrooms. Thanks to being located on the way to a popular touristy area, they took advantage of the interest of tourists who wanted to visit the school. This resulted in the generation of



funds, and at the same time, increased the children interest in learning English. Thanks to that opportunity, they managed to contact an international foundation, with which they formed an alliance that helped them with donations to build additional classrooms and acquire computers. The parents of the school volunteered to create the Tierra Prometida Organic Integral Farm. San Francisco School has been recognized as a carbon-neutral school due to the use of renewable energies such as solar panels and a biodigester. There are no garbage containers in the school, only recycling containers for materials that can be reused or converted into compost.

This school clearly has an integrative vision of Education for Sustainable Development, which is evidenced not only in the daily practice of sustainable actions but also in the execution of specific projects that include the leadership of students, teachers, and directors. Different subject learning sessions are held on the farm since it serves as an open classroom where projects are developed in a hands-on manner. They have also created a cooperative, which is like a mini bank for development, where the students themselves sell products and finance investments for the school and philanthropic projects. Additionally, students develop their own sustainable businesses, becoming entrepreneurs from a very young age.

## Final Reflections

Throughout this journey through innovative schools, I was surprised to see that there is no single formula for carrying out education



Escuela San Francisco. Photo credit: Erika Reinkendorf

committed to sustainability; rather, each institution has the possibility of implementing its own plan according to the resources available and the most relevant problems of its environment. What I can highlight, in most cases, is that putting sustainability principles [4] into practice is totally aligned with any action seeking to increase educational quality. Schools that take into account students' opinions, motivate them to question, take them out of the classroom to explore and learn from the various opportunities the environment offers, encourage them to undertake, seek creative solutions, and collaborate with other people, and organizations are definitely spaces where citizens are being formed who will be prepared to face the challenges of the world we live in.

These schools dared to be pioneers in incorporating a new mentality into their institutions. It doesn't matter if the school is public or private, urban or rural, with many or few resources, when it finds a dedicated and committed leadership team with a vision, they can go beyond their limits. In



many cases, they have achieved this with the help of organizations that promote this change from different areas, such as those previously mentioned: the Costa Rican government's Blue Flag Ecological Programme, the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, the courses and training offered by the Earth Charter, and the NGO ANIA. All these efforts coincide in that the values and principles of sustainability cannot be taught theoretically but are internalized when put into practice because it involves a change in our current lifestyles. Finally, I am convinced that it is possible to educate for the transformation our society requires, so let's not be afraid to start doing so.

## Notes

[1] "A whole-institution approach suggests the incorporation of sustainable development not only through the aspects of the curriculum, but also through an integrated management and governance of the institution, the application of a sustainability ethos, engagement of community and stakeholders, long-term planning, and sustainability monitoring and evaluation" (UNESCO, 2017).

[2] The Blue Flag Ecological Programme for Educational Centers aims to "promote a culture of sustainability in educational centers that allows for the generation of environmentally friendly practices and strengthens the learning processes of students" (MEP, 2023).

[3] 3 "The UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) connects more than 12,000 schools in 182 countries around a common goal to build peace in the minds of children and young people. Through concrete actions member schools promote the ideals of UNESCO valuing rights and dignity, gender equality, social progress, freedom, justice and democracy, respect for diversity and international solidarity. The

Network operates at international and national levels with three clear priorities: education for sustainable development, global citizenship education and intercultural and heritage learning" (UNESCO, 2024).

[4] ESD is characterized by being a learning process that is: Experiential, active, practical; Participatory; Oriented towards collective action; Contextual and meaningful (locally relevant and culturally appropriate); That allows for clarifying, questioning, and examining the values that guide and should guide our actions, decisions, and lifestyles; Collaborative and inclusive; Flexible (fostering the ability to constantly adapt); That stimulates critical thinking; That fosters a vision of the future and creativity" (Jiménez et al., 2021).

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# Global Aims and Beautiful Designs: The Earth Charter and William Morris



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The sacred and secular values of rivers are universal, embodying the global aims of the Earth Charter. These aims echo the environmental and everyday aesthetics of William Morris. Both the Charter's and Morris's visions are reflected in the depiction of riverine and everyday life in the artwork "Along the River during the Qingming Festival." Its 21st-century digital version, "The River of Wisdom," highlights the educational value of appreciating our harmonious relationship with the natural world.

## Global Aims

The aims of the Earth Charter and the challenges it addresses resonate with universal values and issues associated with the planet's rivers, particularly emphasizing "respect and care for the community of life" and "ecological integrity." It also includes goals such as "social and economic justice," "democracy," "nonviolence," and "peace." The concluding section, "Way Forward," acknowledges that harmonizing these aims presents practical problems involving difficult choices. Within the problem of harmonization, rivers symbolize and exemplify the challenges of integrating diverse socio-economic, political, and environmental objectives. Historically, rivers have served various functions for humanity, ranging from mythological to economic. The first civilizations emerged on floodplains of large rivers, which provided fertile soil, fresh water, and

natural travel routes. Rivers were vital to life, and that inspired their sacred status. But managing rivers, saving them even in instances evidenced by restoration projects around the world, necessarily means addressing ecological issues in their working relationships to a complex range of human needs.

Earth Charter aims must move us beyond intellectual and scientific understanding to practical actions. To actions that are replete – in the terms of an Earth Charter principle – with 'love and responsibility'. That is, with actions made with proper awareness of 'protecting diversity', of building 'sustainable lifestyles', and of 'dignity and well-being'. In short, the Earth Charter's 'Way Forward' encourages us to 'find ways to harmonize' all kinds of paired demands, sacred and scientific, natural and human.

We can be encouraged in this pursuit of solutions to sets of ecological-socio-economic problems by the example of the 19th century designer and proto-environmentalist William Morris. In his creative and business life, William Morris faced similar issues of moving from principles to action. He established Morris & Co in 1874, opening shops in London and Manchester, and workshops in south London. He sought the best suppliers and skilled workers with aims of good work, high wages, and producing everyday affordable quality products. But how could this be sustained in the late 19th century western economies of cost-cutting, low wages, and producing shoddy goods,

**“The Earth Charter’s ‘Way Forward’ encourages us to ‘find ways to harmonize’ all kinds of paired demands, sacred and scientific, natural and human.”**

Jeffrey Petts & Ma Shuang



with no regard for environmental costs? Morris understood a global situation, not dissimilar to that faced in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. So, from the 1880s, he wrote and lectured on topics like 'How We Live and How We Might Live' and 'A Factory as It Might Be'. Akin to the Earth Charter's 'Way Forward', Morris integrated his creative and business aims with socio-economic and environmental principles. He realized that this meant political and educational activism. In this, he shares the approach of the Earth Charter's 2024 Conference on 'Education for Ecological Civilizations'.

However, this begs the question of why environmental and related socio-economic problems, long identified, have not been met with solutions sooner. We know the facts, the stories of ravage and destruction. There exists a practical science to deal with many of these problems. But populist thinking for short-term political success, the remoteness of ecological causes, and the sheer numbers of people to persuade, has made educational work

difficult. Building ecological civilizations against this general background suggests the need for more than scientific education backed with politics. A wider and deeper philosophy is required. In that, both east and west offer long traditions of holistic thought that support building sustainable civilizations. Examples include Chinese Daoism, with its emphasis on organicist thinking, and in western ethics, the 'golden rule' applied not simply between people but for all life. If the Earth Charter indicates the need for an ethics and philosophy that generates a thoughtful atmosphere in which we act in the right way towards our natural surroundings, then Morris's example is valuable in suggesting we also need an aesthetic sensibility in all we do and make.

Morris's utopian romance 'News from Nowhere' conveys a universal conception of harmonious work and life that embraces the range and variety of human interests and experience. It is a literary response to the political requirement to offer people a



Photo credit: Eduard Müller



vision of how life might be better: the fundamental need expressed by 'if I could but see it!'. What Morris describes in his 'Nowhere' is a clean River Thames, replete with salmon, and his shabby London suburb by the river transformed by a new bridge, its beauty surpassing even Florence's Ponte Vecchio, the soap-works with their smoke-vomiting chimneys and the lead - works, gone. Buildings are small and fanciful, like shops with painted and gilded vanes, showing no signs of grimy sootiness. It is a new world described in aesthetic terms, in short.

Morris's view directs us to harmonious working relationships between human aims, values, and the natural world. It is one expressed in the 12th century Song Dynasty artwork *Along the River during the Quigming Festival*, a vision of vibrant riverine life, symbolic at least of 'ecological civilization'.

## Sacred Rivers

Human harmony with the natural environment is radically different to the successful interactions of plant and animal

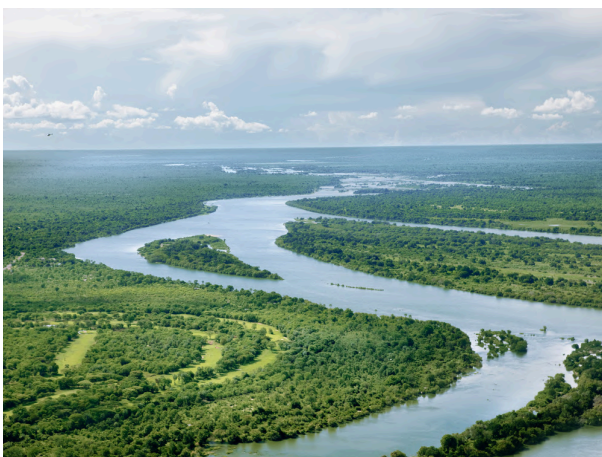


Photo Credit: Pexels.

life. Our interactions engage our conscious, imaginative, working lives in the unique places we live. Morris's home in Hammersmith was part of urban London and the River Thames there was polluted, with its riverbanks blighted by ugly commercial buildings. He imagined the Thames as it might be in his poem, 'The Earthly Paradise':

*"And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,*

*The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green."*

Of course, this pastoralist vision of the English countryside is not generalisable. And yet, it is generally important as an artistic view of realizable aims. Of an 'ecological civilization' on the Thames made aesthetically appealing. The experiential drama of our lives on earth is presented as a thing to understand and love. The state of rivers was both real and symbolic for Morris, evidenced in John Ruskin's description of a tributary of the Thames, the River Wandle [2]. Morris was greatly influenced by Ruskin's aesthetic and social-reforming ideas and later built his Merton Works, where he produced Morris & Co goods, on the Wandle. Ruskin wrote that the source of the Wandle was the "loveliest piece of lowland scenery in South England," expressing "sweet human character and life." But he went on to describe how it had been defiled by "human herds dumping into the source of the river their heaps of dust and slime, and broken shreds of old metal, and rags of





Photo Credit: Getty Images

putrid clothes.” Ruskin’s description appeals to aesthetic as well as environmental sensibilities. And he thinks the polluting behaviour is sacrilegious, despoiling a river’s sacred beauty. In Ruskin’s and Morris’s time too, the Thames reached a deleterious condition, recorded primarily in sensory terms as the ‘Great Stink’. It was, indeed, only this basic experiential response that prompted practical actions to clean and restore the health of the river.

Extreme experiences of environmental damage and climate change prompt political philosophies and practical actions. Ruskin and Morris saw that need, and it is similarly addressed by the Earth Charter. Their special contribution, however, remains linking environmentalism to aesthetics. They both saw problems and envisioned solutions, giving due place to our feelings towards places in any effective ecological, civilizing work. This is not the feeling of tourists toward ‘beauty spots.’ It is an aesthetic sensibility grounded in a sense of responsibility for one’s own local places of beauty. And to

enjoy them in our everyday lives. It is also not then an architectural, landscape aesthetic but one of everyday use and pleasure. In Morris’s *Nowhere*, the Thames is swum in and fished by people living there. What Morris conveys – in his literature, lectures, business, and designs – is the interdependence of environmental conditions and our individual and societal well-being.

All Morris’s work was inspired by the romance of rivers and driven by beautiful design solutions for everything from goods of everyday use to factories and whole communities. That is revealed most clearly in essays like ‘Art and the Beauty of the Earth’. In the spirit of Morris, rivers are indeed sacred but also works (of ‘Art’) in perpetual progress too. Their proper development is real and emblematic of humanity’s progress. Rivers are therefore not tamed by aesthetics but managed, using the appropriate technology, with aesthetic notions of harmony in mind. There is no return to a general state of ‘wilderness’. Still, beautiful ecological civilizations can be built.



Morris's environmentalism is not scientific, but vitally it is literary, visual, and about everyday things we make and use. These are vital elements in building new civilizations because the Earth Charter aims, in those terms, have a reality for people in their everyday lives. Along the River also provokes sacred, caring, and creative experiential responses to riverine life that are generalisable to our proper regard for our environments. That felt experience, as well as scientific understanding, is essential to an effective way forward building ecological civilizations.

## Beautiful Designs

Morris's designs, including his patterns based on idealized views of the tributaries of the Thames, and works of art like *Along the River*, are 'visual ecologies' reflecting socio-economic aims and values [Morris, 1988]. They are important because aesthetic sensibility is vital to building ecological civilizations. Precedent and inspiration should be drawn from other artistic insights, from poetry to the visual



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arts, about what our relationships with the world should be. Their appeals to 'divine' yet real human working relationships offer exemplars and opportunities to feel as well as think about ecological problems.

Beauty is thus conceived, in respect of the principles of the Earth Charter, as evidencing the vitality and inter relatedness of sustainable and progressive living. While these are universal themes of truly human existence, art's forms can still be infinitely various. Again, Morris helps us understand what this means in practice. His designs named after tributaries of the Thames reflect the real botany and physical forms of the countryside, he knew from his Thameside life. They are more than mere decorative patterns applied to wallpapers, for example, in pursuit of 'style' in the home. They are intentional evocations of successful harmonious environments, of integrated, vibrant, and colourful living. Indeed, they are intended to provoke as well as visualise new ways of people and nature living in harmony.

In such creative work, a sense of the sacred is retained, but finds secular meaning too in the experiential value we give to beautiful places and things in our everyday lives. A contemporary example of this spirit of Morris in practice is the British design company, Soane. Its work manufacturing beautiful designs of everyday goods using local skilled workers, sustainable raw materials and processes, adhering to international standards like the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), and collaborative national



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and international networks of workshops, echo Morris's and the Earth Charter's aims and principles. These are integrated then in a way forward that produces beautiful things but also good working lives, international cooperation, and a sustainable natural world. Soane exemplifies the overarching educative aim of Morris and the Earth Charter: emphasis on production in its widest sense of producing good people, things, and places.

These educational aims for bringing about ecological civilizations are also reflected in a set of commitments made in 2023 by Liaoning University in China. The Earth Centre at Liaoning aims to educate students to apply Earth Charter principles in their work and lives. So, the Earth Charter Education Centre at the university aims to enhance recognition among teachers and students: 1) of the interdependence of the global community, 2) of the concept of a human family, with 3) shared responsibility for the well-being of future generations. All are given a focus on promoting sustainable lifestyles and models of human

development. With Morris too in mind, it might reasonably be added that this education requires that this recognition of Earth Charter values should properly engage aesthetic as well as scientific interests.

## Conclusion

Thinking about Earth Charter aims, sacred rivers and beautiful designs suggests an aesthetics of politics insofar as harmonious working relationships are necessarily at the fore of building ecological civilizations. What is meant by that is that the essence of the aims, concerns, and principles of the Earth Charter amounts to a twofold education in both the science of climate change and in something like Morris's practical aesthetics. For example, education enabling 'The Way Forward' is best conceived in terms of encouraging creative, working, beautiful design solutions to environmental problems. It is worth noting too how that education and work alleviates the 'climate anxiety' – recorded in all countries – that people express with only knowing the problem.



This takes us back to the sacred view of rivers and the social and environmental aims and designs we associate with them. In both Morris's art and *Along the River*, the riverine character of vibrant everyday life is celebrated: bustling, flowing, harmonious. Morris's environmentalism is also secular but tends to a paradisaical view, in his poetry and designs, that contrasts with the everyday work and vibrancy of *Along the River*. Morris's bucolic, garden vision might be thought unrealistic, but it properly damns the ugly and polluting, and brings colour and romance to lives. And the example of his business making things at a factory on a tributary of the Thames is a real contribution to conceiving the Earth Charter's aims in practical terms that engage all its environmental and socio-economic principles. It is work that stands alongside the poetry of trade, indicated by lines from an 18th century poem attached to the 12th century *Along the River*:

*"A wall of gold is mounted on Shu brocade*

*Watchtowers of the city rise to great heights*

*The bustling scene is truly impressive."*

Aims, at their best, are inspiring, evoking experiential, aesthetic visions of better lives. They are underpinned but not confined to the science and principles informing them. So, it is vital to apply aims with beauty in mind, that is, with the quality of experiential lives foremost. Then, like Morris the craftsman and

environmentalist, individuals will not only know what is wrong with bad ways of making and living, but point it out in our daily lives and, most importantly, create a new sustainable beautiful world through their own works. Morris offers an integrated vision of ecology and social and developmental aims, where action is initiated in good work: in care for one's local environment and conditions of life, and in making things in new sustainable and pleasurable ways.

In 2010, an animated version of *Along the River* was created and named *The River of Wisdom*. The lesson it teaches – evident in William Morris's work and the Earth Charter's 'Way Forward' – is the beauty of working harmonies, of divine and practical collaborations, artistic and technological, rural and urban, between humanity and nature.

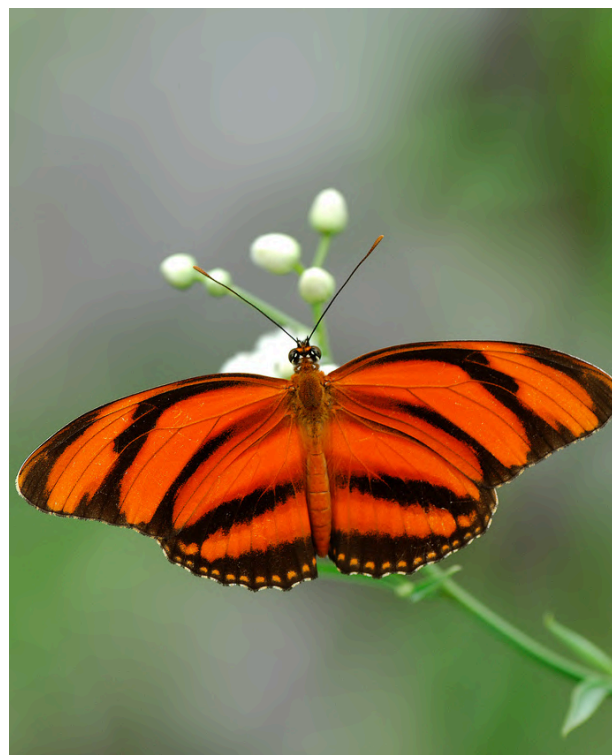


Photo Credit: Eduard Müller.



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# Ancestral Food, Sustainability, and Food Sovereignty in Michoacán, Mexico: an Analysis under Principle 7 of the Earth Charter



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## Introduction:

A common denominator of expressions about food sovereignty is the capacity and right of a country to design, develop, and implement its policies for the production, distribution, and consumption of healthy, nutritious, fresh, and culturally appropriate food, where intermediation or hoarding is minimized. We believe that food sovereignty must go beyond ensuring food for the inhabitants of a region; it must be articulated with the culture of a people, as well as with respect and care for the community of life, maintaining the balance of the ecosystems where such foods are produced, ensuring social and economic justice and inclusion, avoiding violence, and promoting peace, from a more ethical perspective proposed by the Earth Charter [2000]. Therefore, it is essential to understand that the path to sustainability requires understanding and achieving food sovereignty.

Within the framework of the research project "Towards food sovereignty in lacustrine regions of Michoacán from social responsibility: impact from the actors," approved and funded by the National Council of Humanities, Science, and Technology [CONAHCYT] and derived from the collaboration agreement with the Honorable Municipality of Quiroga, Michoacán, the "1st Ancestral Food Fair of Quiroga and its communities: towards food sovereignty" was held on September 24, 2023, at the Ecotourism Center Cerro Sandio. The objective of this fair was to promote conservation through the dissemination of ancestral food, prepared by cooks with local products from the lacustrine region of the municipality, as a

demonstration of their food sovereignty and contribution to sustainability. The activity involved the communities of San Andrés Tziróndaro, Santa Fe de la Laguna, El Calvario, and San Jerónimo Purenchécuaro, from the municipality of Quiroga, and the Collective of Research and Advocacy [CII], located in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. The objective was to promote their local foods, such as fish, mushrooms, corn, and traditional local beverages such as mezcal, pulque, and seasonal fruit waters. This article provides an overview of this project and its evaluation, which was carried out using the Earth Charter as a reference, particularly fundamental principle 7 of the second Pillar, "Ecological Integrity." Sustainability, food sovereignty, ancestral food, and the Earth Charter.

Via Campesina, in a statement in 2003, states that food sovereignty should include:

- Prioritizing local agricultural production to feed the population.
- Access for peasants and landless people to land, water, seeds, and credit.
- The right of peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to decide what they want to consume and how and who produces it.
- The right of countries to protect themselves from excessively cheap agricultural and food imports.
- Agricultural prices linked to production costs.
- The participation of people in defining agricultural policy.
- The recognition of the rights of peasant women who play an essential role in agricultural production and food.



Photo credit: Getty Images

The social and economic characteristics necessary for food sovereignty are obvious, but the environmental dimension and ethical sensitivity for the conservation of the ecosystems that provide the environmental services on which life depends and guarantee food sovereignty in the territories are often overlooked.

Therefore, sustainability is a necessary condition for food sovereignty to achieve the well-being of the population from this perspective, it implies mainly respect, social responsibility, and care for the community of life. Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems, promoting social and economic justice, as well as favoring inclusion, democracy, non-violence, and promoting peace in decision-making, are substantive conditions for achieving food sovereignty.

From this paradigm, how is the sustainability of the food system understood? In 1997, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published the book on Production and Management of Food Chemical Composition Data in Nutrition,

and particularly in chapter 4, an article is presented "Situation of Food Security in Latin America" where the authors Cecilio Morón and Alejandro Schejtman define food sustainability "as the capacity to ensure, within a certain period, that the levels of sufficiency, stability, and autonomy achieved do not imply such a deterioration of renewable and non-renewable natural resources that it makes impossible to sustain the desirable conditions of the food system in the long term, affecting the food security of future generations". (Moron & Schejtman, 1997, pp. 29).

Although this definition attempts to encompass the social dimension to mitigate hunger and shows environmental concern, the absence of the cultural dimension is observed. Consequently, key components of social and economic justice are not visible in this FAO reflection. It seems to be a relatively new concept in the world, although on more than one occasion, it has been explored unwittingly, as already demonstrated by indigenous populations.





**“Sustainability is a necessary condition for food sovereignty to achieve the well-being of the population; it implies mainly respect, social responsibility, and care for the community of life.”**

Mateo Alfredo Castillo Ceja  
Katia Beatriz Villafán Vidales  
Janeth Ortiz Ruiz



The definition of food sustainability is constantly evolving; it highlights and intertwines the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political dimensions primarily, although often from the cultural dimension, the spiritual dimension has its presence when dealing with indigenous peoples. In this sense, food sustainability not only focuses on agricultural productivity but also on a series of other activities that revolve around the food chain.

From the perspective of the Earth Charter, food sustainability is understood as a process that, from the generation of raw materials [extraction], transportation, intermediate product [production], packaging, use-consumption, and final disposal, respects and cares for the community of life, maintains the balance of the ecosystems where the raw materials were cultivated or developed. Its processes are socially and economically fair, maintaining inclusion in decision-making and process execution, which does not generate violence and contributes to peace.

On the other hand, in Mexico, there is a special effort to value and rescue ancestral food as an essential part of our culture and identity. However, the current preparation process of ancestral food is not always carried out sustainably or healthily, nor responsibly with the environment, since raw materials, inputs, and materials have an ecological footprint that would need to be quantified.

So, what does sustainability imply in food sovereignty? It implies sustainable agriculture that respects ecological principles of diversity, interdependence, and self-sufficiency. It is based on a fair and equitable distribution of nature's goods, recognizing and defending the human and collective rights of communities, and promotes the direct participation of communities in the management of their territory, in policy definition and decision-making.

It implies looking responsibly at the environmental dimension, as it is where environmental services are provided that guarantee the different processes of sovereignty, the social dimension to address hunger as part of the health it promotes, prioritizing social and economic justice without a doubt, inclusion, democracy, tolerance, and the construction of peace. It implies an agriculture that is creative and intelligent, harmonizing social, economic, environmental, cultural, political, and spiritual needs. It is with this perspective that we approach this project and the evaluation of the 1st Ancestral Food Fair of Quiroga and its communities: towards food sovereignty.

The Ancestral Food Fair, from a perspective of the sustainability of food sovereignty: an analysis under the 7th principle of the Earth Charter, was presented as an opportunity to promote local foods that characterize the ancestral food of the indigenous communities of



San Andrés Tzirondaro, Santa Fe de la Laguna, El Calvario, and San Gerónimo Purenchécuaro in the municipality of Quiroga, based primarily on food from local agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering, as well as traditional beverages such as mezcal, pulque, and seasonal fruit waters, with the prominent use of corn, beans, chili, and squash. The central objective of the fair was to promote conservation by disseminating ancestral food prepared by local cooks with local products from the lakeside region of the municipality, as a demonstration of their food sovereignty and contribution to sustainability. Through the lens of the 7th principle of the Earth Charter, this effort allows us to observe and appreciate its sustainability.

Although since the beginning of this project, three months before the fair, constant meetings were held with municipal authorities and the CII to plan and organize the fair, as well as to provide recommendations to carry out an environmentally friendly event. It was observed that material attachments to the lifestyles of the new generations, caused by the capitalist consumption system, have taken root and become part of their customs supposedly to facilitate their lives. This reflects significant environmental impacts, such as the use of single-use disposables and unhealthy products in the manufacture of their foods, among others.

Information gathering during the fair was carried out through dialogue with the participants in the fair, as well as with attendees and inhabitants of the community in the context of the

preparation and consumption of food. Observation of the kitchen stalls, and especially of the behaviors during the manufacturing, consumption, and design of the offered foods, was continuous and substantive for this report. Special attention was paid to the use of local products, how they processed their foods, how they displayed them for sale, and how they were consumed.



Photo credit: Mateo Castillo

In this regard, the analysis is based on the second pillar, "Ecological Integrity" of the Earth Charter, related to "adopting patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the regenerative capacities of the Earth, human rights, and community well-being" with five action principles that guide the analysis of activities such as the one described in this article.

These action principles are: reducing, reusing, and recycling materials used in production and consumption systems and ensuring that residual wastes can be assimilated by ecological systems; acting with moderation and efficiency in the use of energy and striving to increasingly rely on renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind; promoting the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies; internalizing the total



Photo Credit: Sandor & Lunamarina

environmental and social costs of goods and services into their selling price and enabling consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards; ensuring universal access to health care that promotes reproductive health and responsible reproduction and adopting lifestyles that emphasize quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

For this activity, thirty-three dishes were exhibited at the stands and offered for sale and consumption. Some stands were humble, while others were opulent. The generosity and ambition of the participants were observed, highlighting the importance of chefs showcasing their methods of preparing their foods, the flavors, smells, and colors of ancestral dishes, whose recipes have been passed down within the community from generation to generation. This was offered to an audience that until then, unaware of its existence. The observed and commented results are shown according to each applicable action principle of Principle 7, pillar 2 of the Earth Charter.

Action Principle 7.a, Reduce, reuse, and recycle materials used in production and consumption systems and ensure that residual wastes can be assimilated by ecological systems. It was observed that some of the exhibitors used Styrofoam cups and plates for the sale of their food, which are unrecyclable. This situation is normalized in the everyday life of Mexican society, and it is assumed that responsibility for use ends with disposing of it in the container.



Action Principle 7.b. Act with moderation and efficiency when using energy and strive to increasingly rely on renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind.

The stands installed at the fair used gas or firewood; no alternative energy was observed. It is pertinent to note that this type of energy contributes to climate change, so it is advisable to consider new alternatives based on solar or wind energy or to be responsible for conserving forests for sustainable use of timber resources as energy and incorporating new technologies to reduce the use of firewood.

Action Principle 7.c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

The Fair rewarded the most representative dishes that were made with local products and met the ancestral and representative characteristics of the region. The awarded chefs were given a portable Patsari stove as an alternative to sustainable cooking for two reasons: first, it reduces wood consumption by up to 60%, and second, it minimizes smoke in the home, benefiting the health of the cook and the family sharing the household. Eight stoves were awarded through an allied project of the National Research and Advocacy Projects [PRONAI] Ecomovil 321271 of the National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM] and through the PRONAI of food sovereignty and social responsibility 321309, of the Michoacana University of San Nicolás de Hidalgo [UMSNH].

Action Principle 7.d. Internalize the total environmental and social costs of goods and services into their selling price and allow consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.

It was identified that the products for sale generally met social, environmental, and cultural characteristics. However, it was noted that information about the purpose of the fair, the meaning of food sovereignty, and sustainable food was not entirely clear.

Action Principle 7.f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

The Fair showed the possibility of adopting and rescuing a form of nutrition that is on the verge of extinction due to the effects of globalization, by promoting the preparation of their food from local products and environmentally friendly technologies. It was observed that although the spices and condiments used, such as cumin, cloves, cinnamon, and bay leaf, are not produced locally, they complement the flavors. Additionally, they were cooked with refined grain oils; however, some vendors also used lard.

## Conclusions

Achieving food sovereignty and sustainability will indeed be a challenge while promoting the rescue of ancestral food. We must strive to achieve the necessary synergies to rescue and develop the capacities of the inhabitants of this lake region to feed their population, all while harnessing their local food knowledge



without harming their natural resources and preserving the culture of each region through gastronomy, which gives cultural identity.

Thanks to the organization of this event and its aims, a process of raising awareness among the involved communities was initiated, along with the enjoyment of smells, flavors, and smiles. During the event, a sense of gratitude and kindness among the participants was perceived, as well as a perception of what we can achieve as humanity to build just, sustainable, and peaceful societies.

Despite the efforts made to achieve a "successful" event to showcase healthy and sustainable food, it is understood that these efforts were not enough to influence the transformation of consciousness in favor of a cleaner planet. However, it was demonstrated that ancestral foods can be on the path to sustainability through more responsible and healthier preparation in harmony with the region's environment. These are the first steps, and it is clear that

we must further influence this transformation, where egos that crave individualism are transformed by solidarity and by undoing the neoliberalism that has contaminated indigenous customs. Therefore, it is necessary to design an education and training program for sustainable development.

Innovation is not separate from sustainability, so an additional effort will need to be made wisely to conserve ancestral cuisine, allowing for food sovereignty and sustainability.

Unlike ancestral food, which is categorized as healthy and sustainable nutrition, current food consumption driven by globalization is notable for its impact on population health, leading to malnutrition that exacerbates chronic degenerative diseases such as obesity, hypertension, hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, and diabetes, primarily.

The Fair, as a laboratory for social observation, identifies opportunities and social innovation, in which solidarity,



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respect, care, tolerance, compassion, inclusion, respect, and justice are values that we must continue to work toward to achieve more just, sustainable, and peaceful societies.

We cannot say that the "1st Ancestral Food Fair of Quiroga and its communities: towards food sovereignty" event was sustainable, but the steps taken were substantive and will inspire future events where the community collectively and responsibly appropriates this and other initiatives on food sovereignty.

The utility of the Earth Charter as an evaluation instrument for sustainability is appreciated, primarily using principle 7. This allows us to observe, from a different perspective, the lifestyle reflected through Purépecha cuisine, understood as the pre-Hispanic diet of the Purépecha people based on corn, beans, chili, and squash, supplemented with products from agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Furthermore, it allows us to understand the values that contribute to well-being in order to adopt production and consumption patterns that must be preserved and serve as a reference for other projects that need to assess their progress towards sustainability.



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