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



Silvia Ferrero

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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.

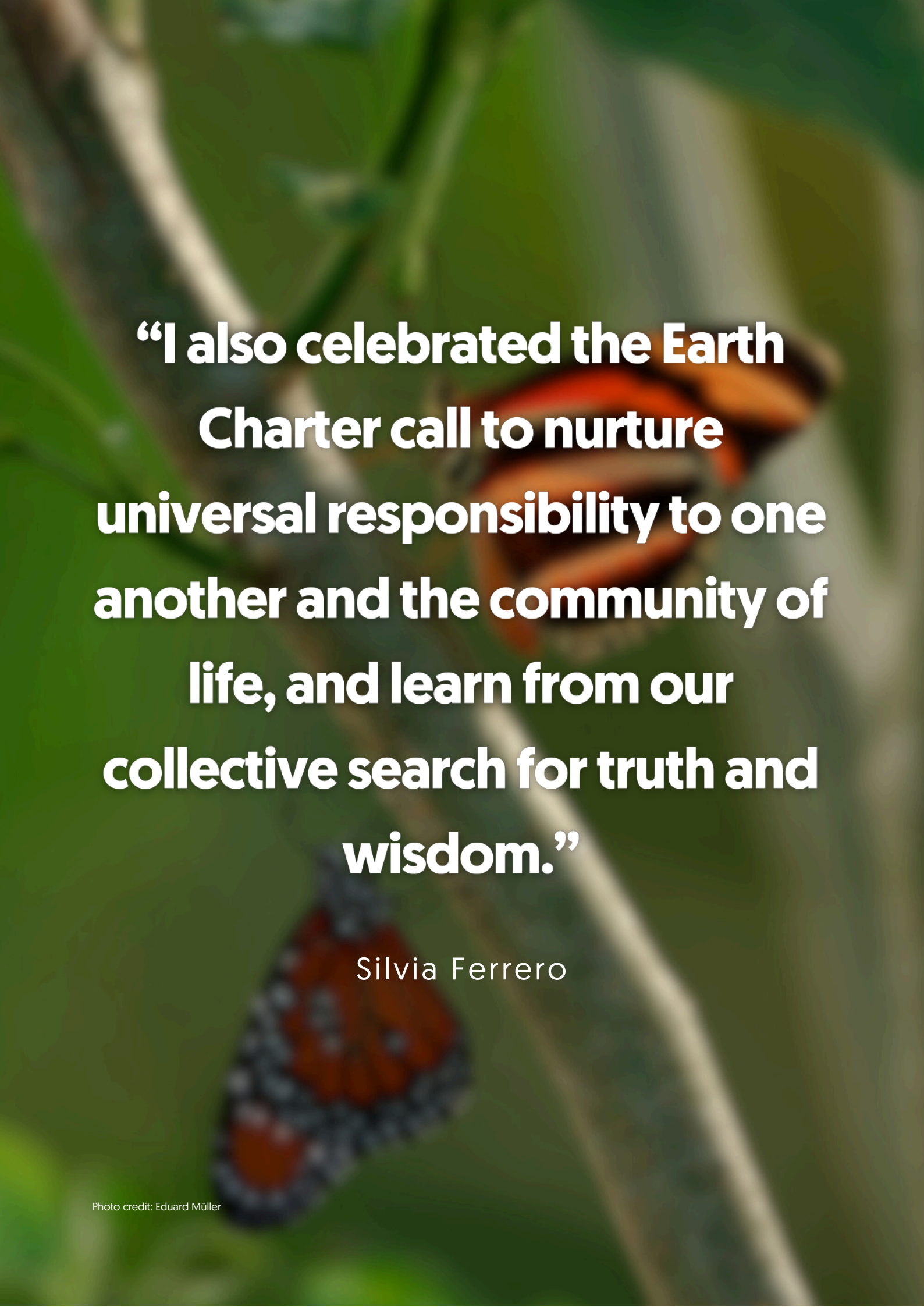
André Rochais loved to describe himself as ‘an ordinary man, born into an ordinary family’ [Rouyer, 1994, p.3]. His definition of ‘ordinary person’ was intended to become a humble example of the wonderment towards the creations and endeavours that

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.



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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



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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.

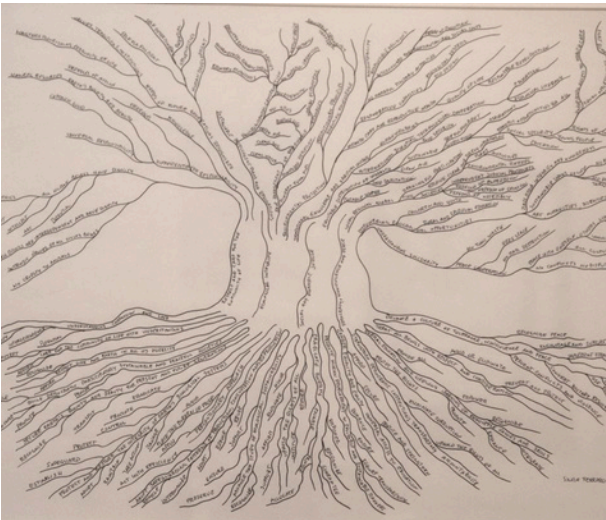


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The Tree of Life is a metaphorical representation of the synergies and vitality expressed in the values and principles of the Earth Charter. It is an imaginary projection of the beautiful outcomes that values and principles can produce when they are 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 \(youtube.com\)](#))



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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.



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## References

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