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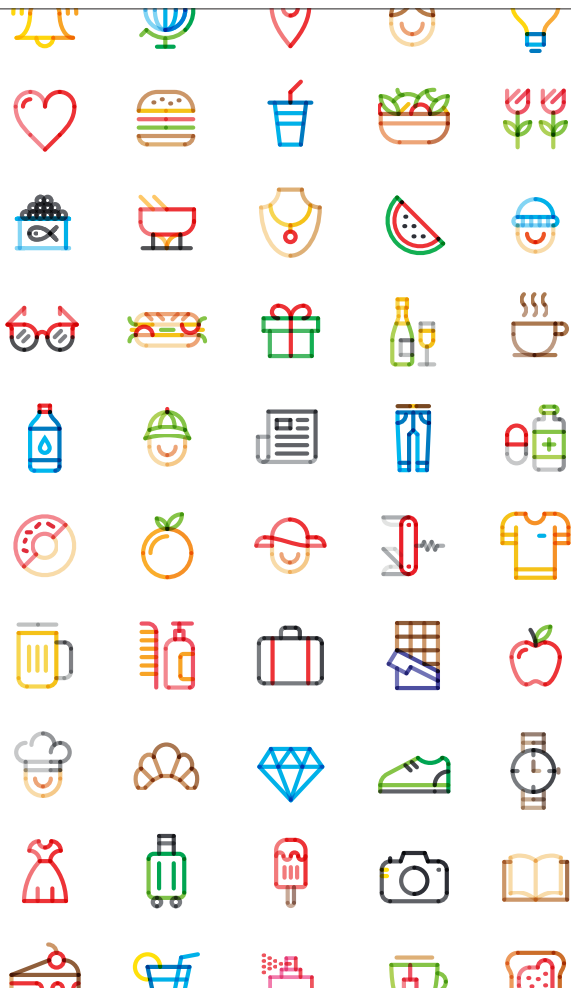
Planetary Health

BRINGING HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT
AND SOCIETY TO A RESILIENT PLANET

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BRINGING HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY TO A RESILIENT PLANET

Our May issues usually focus on global health and how we are making progress towards health-related goals. But that is clearly no longer sufficient because so much of what happens to the health of people is linked to what happens to the health of the planet.

Our commitment is to planetary health by having articles that connect all those silos, having stories from various levels of action, including education, research, making knowledge accessible, and engaging with people. This issue includes an interview with the Ambassador of Kenya in Geneva, a dive into the understanding of climate change, and engagement of the communities are only a few of the pieces on the topic. I hope you will enjoy the articles in this feature.

And of course, we have many other articles for you to enjoy. We would like to hear from our readers as we work on future issues of the magazine this year, so I want to invite you to send me comments, ideas and suggestions for the magazine.

I hope you enjoy this issue. //

APPORTER LA SANTÉ, L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET LA SOCIÉTÉ À UNE PLANÈTE RÉSILIENTE

Nos numéros de mai se concentrent généralement sur la santé mondiale et sur la façon dont nous progressons vers les objectifs liés à la santé. Mais cela n'est clairement plus suffisant, car une grande partie de ce qui arrive à la santé des personnes est liée à ce qui arrive à la santé d'une planète.

Nous nous engageons à promouvoir la santé planétaire en publiant des articles qui relient tout ces silos, en présentant des histoires à différents niveaux d'action, notamment l'éducation, la recherche, l'accessibilité des connaissances et l'engagement avec les gens. Ce numéro comprend un entretien avec l'ambassadeur du Kenya à Genève, une plongée dans la compréhension du changement climatique et l'engagement de la communauté ne sont que quelques-uns des éléments sur le sujet. J'espère que vous apprécierez les articles de cet article de fond.

Et bien sûr, nous avons beaucoup d'autres articles à vous proposer. Nous aimerions connaître l'avis de nos lecteurs alors que nous travaillons sur les prochains numéros du magazine cette année. Je vous invite donc à m'envoyer vos commentaires, idées et suggestions pour le magazine.

J'espère que vous apprécierez ce numéro. //



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May 2024

N°836

FEATURED

- 06** Climate action requires reform of the global financial architecture
- 10** WHO Leadership in Emergencies learning spotlight
- 12** Eye health plays a vital role in reducing inequity of health care access
- 16** Community engagement
- 20** From Eco-Anxiety to Action: Navigating Climate Emotions

INTERNATIONAL GENEVA

- 24** Navigating towards sustainability
- 29** Tragédie de la beauté alpine
- 30** Democratizing the Art World
- 34** Embracing double challenges
- 36** Forget the obsolete notion of a “just war”
- 38** Stolen Focus

ART & CULTURE

- 40** Au pied de la « montagne sacrée »
- 44** Four-Thousand Miles Across Siberia
- 48** Le col de la Bernina
- 51** Menton



12

PHOTO COVER
MONIKA GRABKOWSKA - UNSPLASH



24



51

Climate action requires reform of the global financial architecture

UNSUSTAINABLE DEBT SERVICE SERIOUSLY HAMPERS NATIONAL EFFORTS TO MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE – AN INTERVIEW

I met with Dr. Mailu in December 2023 in his office at the Kenyan mission in Geneva, to learn about his views on the climate, international development agenda, as well as Kenya's priorities in the near future. The following is a summary of our discussion.

As home to UNEP headquarters and with the recent conference aimed at limiting plastic pollution, how optimistic is Kenya about protecting its environment? Are international conferences and commitments really helpful in this regard?

Kenya is proud to host the Headquarters for the United Nations Environment Programme and Habitat (UNEP), which is in fact the only UN Headquarters in a developing country. H.E. the President William Ruto officially opened the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-3), that was held from 13 to 19 November 2023 at the UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. Immediately after opening the INC-3 conference, H.E. the President led the country on a national tree planting day.

Kenya's commitment to ending plastic pollution was demonstrated with the ban on the manufacture and use of polythene bags in 2017, followed closely in 2020 by a ban on single-use plastics in protected areas such as national parks, forests and beaches. Furthermore, in July 2022, the Kenyan Government enacted the Sustainable Waste Management Act which made our country the first in the world to subject all products, including plastics, to Extended Producer Responsibility.

Kenya is optimistic about protecting its environment and we believe international conferences and commitments come in handy in ensuring

that we collectively address the interconnected triple planetary crises of climate change, plastic pollution and biodiversity loss – challenges which can only be addressed together.

US\$ 100 billion promised in Paris Agreement never materialized. Meanwhile, developing countries contribute less than 4% to global emissions, but bear the brunt of many of the effects of climate change. If you were responsible for administering climate change funds, what would be your strategy?

As H.E. President William Ruto stated at the Africa Climate Summit held this past September, *"Climate change is destroying the economies of African nations and forcing affected countries to divert their budgets and resources meant for economic growth to dealing with the effects of climate change."*

While it is true that most developing countries contribute less to global emissions but bear the brunt of effects, addressing the climate crisis requires an approach that brings all countries to the table with each one of them having a role to play, precisely because climate change is a global problem. Therefore, all countries depending on their comparative advantage should collaborate and cooperate in ensuring availability of adequate climate finance, appropriate technology transfer and requisite capacity-building programmes, while leveraging renewable energy sources that exist in some countries and continents – for example, solar power in Africa.

Regarding administering climate change funds, it would be necessary to have a clear and transparent governance framework with balanced criteria as to how much funds go to mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage and which country gets what. Within this approach, international cooperation remains indispensable. Climate finance also needs to be adequate, equitable and predictable.



Prior to his appointment in January 2018 as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations in Geneva, Ambassador Dr. Cleopa Mailu was the Cabinet Secretary for Health since 2015. Throughout his long and distinguished career in Public Service, Dr. Mailu held key Professional, Management and Leadership positions in the Ministry of Health, Kenyatta National Teaching and Referral Hospital and the Private Sector. He served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Nairobi Hospital, a leading private hospital in Kenya for 12 years.

Ambassador Mailu is a qualified medical doctor (MB, CHB; 1984, University of Nairobi; Msc. Med. Science (Genetics), University of Glasgow, UK) with special interest in Clinical Genetics and in-situ hybridization. He is married to Theresa Mailu and a proud father to Dr. Dennis Mailu and Alex Mailu.

H.E. Dr. Cleopa Kilonzo Mailu, EBS, EGH, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations Office in Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland.

And while noting the importance of climate finance, a change of course in the global community is needed to ensure that there is a real reduction in emissions. Climate finance is important, but also very crucial is course correction to avert further catastrophes.

The UN Secretary-General stated that: *“On average, African countries pay four times more for borrowing than the United States and eight times more than the wealthiest European economies. A total of 52 countries - almost 40 percent of the developing world - are in serious debt trouble.”* I think most people would agree that developing countries need to spend money on health and education and not on servicing debt. How can we resolve the debt crisis and which institutional changes, if any, are needed to facilitate this process?

Indeed, unsustainable debt has been regarded as a global challenge mostly affecting developing countries, particularly African countries. This challenge has been exacerbated by cascading crises including the climate crisis, geopolitical crises and the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Recently, interest rates have risen around the world, in response to the Great Inflation.

The most critical concern is the need to de-risk African countries because the high perceived risk on investments in African countries has partly contributed to high interest rates on loans and poor debt structure characterised by short repayment periods.

This has led to a scenario whereby a huge proportion of national revenue is directed towards servicing debt interest and principal repayments, with much of the rest going towards mitigating against the negative effects of climate change such as drought and floods which Kenya has immensely suffered from.

Statistics have also shown that many developing countries are spending more on debt than on education and health combined, which implies limited fiscal space left to address other national development priorities.

Therefore, we need to address the debt crisis and the whole issue of financing for development - H.E. the President has been very vocal about the need to reform the international financial architecture to promote affordable financing mechanisms in order to better address the needs of developing countries.

The entire system of risk assessment and the opaque methodologies employed by credit rating agencies and risk analysis needs to be overhauled. 3.3 billion people in developing countries are trapped in a vicious cycle of emergency responses, reconstruction, and recovery leading vulnerable countries into a downward spiral of debt and reduced investment in development.

[Speaking of expanding the tax base, What do you think about the OECD sponsored “minimum global tax of 15%”?](#)

On 22nd November 2023, the U.N. General Assembly voted 125 to 48 to adopt a resolution tabled by Nigeria on behalf of African Member States, calling for a UN tax convention that could drastically change how global tax rules are set. The new resolution calls for the creation of an ad hoc intergovernmental committee open to all UN Member States with a bureau of no more than 20 members, elected with gender and regional balance in mind, which would be tasked with establishing the terms of reference for “a United Nations framework convention on international tax cooperation” by August 2024.

Regarding the OECD-sponsored minimum global tax, we believe that this process is not fully inclusive, transparent nor universally legitimate, as it is being driven by a regional body comprising mostly of developed countries with no clear rules of procedure. The UN therefore, having the universality of membership with existing structures is the best place to negotiate an instrument on international cooperation on tax matters.

[As a medical doctor, you can appreciate that Covid-19 has been a challenging time for many countries and has given rise to questions about the need to build greater self-reliance in the provision of critical supplies such as medicines, masks and protective equipment, among others. What lessons can we draw from the COVID-19 pandemic and how can we prepare better for the next eventual crisis?](#)

COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of building resilience in health systems, which have to be able to withstand disruptions and shocks brought on by health outbreaks but also emerging threats of public health significance such as extreme weather events, conflict and financial crises.

Equity has become an even more topical issue in global health, largely due to the failure of the existing market forces to deliver on access to

COVID-19 vaccines and treatments for all, especially for those who are most vulnerable and deemed at higher risk. One of the clear priorities for the African region is the urgent need to diversify global vaccine manufacturing to regions with least capacity and capability, given the political realities of nationalism and trade barriers. In this connection, the African Union (AU) has set the goal of increasing the production of locally consumed vaccines from current levels of 1% to 60% by 2040.

In this connection, the Kenyan Government has partnered with the International Vaccine Institute to support the company Kenya Biovax Limited to explore how we can increasingly manufacture vaccines for childhood and some other priority diseases prevalent in our population. You might have also heard of the collaboration between Moderna and the Government of Kenya for the company’s first mRNA manufacturing facility in Africa, with the ability to produce up to 500 million doses of vaccines each year. This will involve both drug substance and drug product manufacturing for Kenya and the African continent.

In conclusion, strengthening regional vaccine production capacity has broader significance beyond COVID-19, for example, for the development and production of vaccines that protect against illnesses such as tuberculosis and malaria. This is critical for the sustainability of any new facility.

[Switching to politics, how easy or difficult is it for African countries to make their views known and chart their own course, in this “multipolar” world of entrenched & deepening divisions?](#)

Like other regional or economic groupings, African countries have made significant efforts to improve the effectiveness of their collaboration, not only in Geneva but also in other multilateral stations across the globe. This has enabled us to align positions on various multilateral issues, including peace and security, humanitarian affairs, human rights, health, labour, trade and development, amongst others.

Through the African Group that is usually coordinated by the African Union, African countries have been able to express their views and concerns on various multilateral issues and advocate for their interests. Both continental mechanisms like the African Union as well as sub-regional organizations like the East African Community or the Inter-Governmental Organization on Development (IGAD) remain key platforms to

advance common positions. These mechanisms are all very crucial in pan-African thought-leadership, building consensus and shaping the global agenda to fit within our African Union Agenda 2063 aspirations and the Africa we want to see.

Similarly, African countries also collaborate with other developing countries to advance their interests and promote their agenda for example through the Group of 77 and China, the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), the ACP group, and the group of Like-Minded Developing Countries, among others.

Scanning the global landscape, let me note that multipolarity in itself is not a negative factor-it can also present opportunities. There are various other aspects that we are witnessing which are troubling-such as the trust deficit, heightening tensions and deepening divisions that undermine action on issues that require concerted global action. While these are challenges for Africa, they are also challenges that affect us all in the global community. It is our aspiration that these obstacles can subside to really have an optimally functioning multilateral system for all.

Another challenge that some African countries face, as you might already know, is the smaller size of delegations in some key multilateral settings which hampers optimal participation in some dense multilateral engagements.

[In conclusion, what are the priorities of the Kenyan Government, at home and abroad, in these challenging times?](#)

Kenya's National Development Priorities are guided by the Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), the Fourth Medium Term Plan (2023-2027) of Kenya Vision 2030, the East African Community (EAC) vision 2050, AU Agenda 2063 and the UN agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Kenya's priorities in pursuit of its economic growth and social development are outlined in its national long-term development blueprint called the Kenya Vision 2030, which came into force in 2008 and which aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean and secure environment.

The country is optimistic about its growing and increasingly tech-savvy youthful population which presents an opportunity to develop high

technology and high knowledge-intensive industries which will help us transform our industrialization potential into reality. There is a growing demographic dividend which we are keen to nurture and ensure that our young people thrive-because when young people thrive, the country thrives.

Consequently, industrialization will be vital for us to build decent jobs and a robust middle class as well as a reliable consumer market. This will help Kenya fully integrate into regional and global supply chains and markets.

In terms of maintaining progress towards Universal Primary and Secondary Education, we have built on the progress achieved by the previous education system and have now institutionalized a competence-based curriculum (CBC) which is learner-centered and takes into consideration the market needs. This is aimed at ensuring a better transition from primary to secondary and even tertiary level, leading students eventually to the job market.

Kenya has a reputation for being one of Africa's most "wired" nations. Kenya's ICT sector has continued to witness strong growth with rising demand for ICT services and Kenya remains a global leader in fintech solutions and digital finance inclusivity which are largely facilitated by ICTs.

National priorities abroad are guided by the Kenya Foreign Policy which focusses on safeguarding Kenya's interests around peace and security as well as economic interests.

Kenya is proud of the contributions it continues to make in its tireless endeavour to support peace-making, conflict prevention, peace keeping, peace building, and other interventions undertaken across different regions.

In conclusion, both climate action and sustainable development goals must be pursued with greater resolve, urgency and ambition. No meaningful development can take place in countries that are also struggling with climate shocks. //

WHO Leadership in Emergencies learning spotlight

Q&A WITH SEAN CASEY ON HIS RECENT DEPLOYMENT TO GAZA

On 7 January, Sean Casey was in Al-Aqsa hospital in the Gaza Strip delivering supplies for WHO and planning additional clinical support. In a video posted to WHO social media, Sean describes what he's seeing as a chaotic scene unfolds in the emergency department behind him.

In this Q&A, we speak with Sean - one of more than 500 graduates of WHO's Leadership in Emergencies training programme - about his deployment in Gaza, how he applied what he learned in the training programme and why leadership skills are critical to health emergency response.

Now in its sixth year, WHO's Leadership in Emergencies programme provides regionally tailored courses in English and French to build skills in emotional intelligence, negotiation and coordination to enable safe and effective health emergency response.

Sean has worked in emergencies in more than 45 countries, and he is currently serving as Programme Area Manager for Emergency Operations in the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific. From 4 December 2023 to 10 January 2024, he was one of the few WHO staff in Gaza supporting the emergency response. This interview was edited for brevity.

What was your role in the Gaza emergency response?

Pre-war there were 36 hospitals across the Gaza Strip. Most of them have since been directly affected by the conflict and in some cases damaged or made inoperable. In quite a few cases, the staff and patients fled. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in demand and need for health services.

The intention behind my deployment was to facilitate Emergency Medical Team (EMT) deployments to provide additional clinical capacity within Gaza's hospitals; so as much as possible to support Gaza's hospitals to continue to function. Where that wasn't possible, we worked to

establish stand-alone field hospitals to expand bed and service capacity.

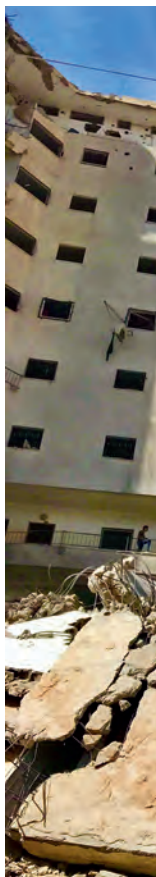
Beyond my EMT role, I also worked on delivering supplies and fuel to Gaza's hospitals to try to allow them to function. And I did a significant amount of communications work - making videos reporting on what we were seeing and doing, and speaking at three UN press conferences during and immediately after my deployment.

How did you apply what you learned in the Leadership in Emergencies courses?

There were a number of elements that relate to WHO's leadership and coordination functions that I applied in terms of WHO's Emergency Response Framework and making sure that we were meeting our requirements, particularly as the provider of last resort in a major emergency where there were very few agencies operating given the security context. Our top priority as WHO, and my top priority as an individual, was to be able to deliver for the people of Gaza and make sure that we were meeting, as much as we could, the needs from a health perspective.

Working in Gaza also required a high level of - and I recall back to the training - emotional intelligence, empathy and understanding. There was nobody in Gaza that wasn't directly affected on a daily basis by what was happening. All of the WHO staff in Gaza and all of our clinical and public health counterparts had been displaced or lost homes or family members. Everybody was affected and not superficially; they were profoundly affected. So working in that context required understanding that suffering and personal tragedy, and taking that into consideration with almost every interaction.

At the same time, it is a highly complex political environment - and that was a part of the training that we received: dealing with the press, dealing with negotiations, etc. Every day was a collaborative discussion with other UN agencies about sharing assets and resources, negotiating which missions should be prioritized because we had such limited assets: should we



plosions and gunshots happening around us all the time. We would spend hours going to and from guesthouses every day because the streets were full of displaced persons. We need to understand that we all have stress points - and I personally haven't always nailed that in terms of how I deal with them. We also are all trying to do our best for people and sometimes that causes conflict. Patience and respect are critical, but in high-intensity environments, these virtues are constantly tested.

ALSO SEE



[Why are leadership skills so important in health emergency response?](#)

We can't deliver for those who need our assistance if we can't manage ourselves and our teams in the most challenging circumstances. We need to be empathetic with ourselves, with our colleagues, with the people we're serving and with the people we're coordinating with.

One of the challenges that comes to mind is with one of my senior counterparts in the Ministry of Health - I couldn't reach him for several days, and I came to learn that he was busy trying to find shelter for his family. This is a senior official, but you have to remember how significantly affected everybody is; having that understanding, that empathy and communicating effectively in that context so that people know that you're supporting them as people, as well as health leaders. I may be chasing someone for answers to my questions, but I have to do it in a supportive and understanding way.

[What would be your advice for aspiring emergency leaders?](#)

In every experience, there have been things that have not gone optimally. You have to make decisions and sometimes those aren't the right decisions. You have to learn from mistakes and remember them well. I think it's really useful to journal and to keep those reflections - not just about what you've done, but what you thought about it, what you felt about it, why you made decisions the way that you did - and continue to use those reflections to improve.

I certainly made mistakes in Gaza. There were impossible situations almost on a daily basis. But I think and I hope that I've learned from them, and I try not to make the same mistake twice.

The Leadership in Emergencies training is managed by the WHO Health Emergencies Programme's Learning and Capacity Development Unit. //

prioritize food missions or health missions or WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] missions? - which is an impossible decision to make. Almost everybody in Gaza is starving, there's very little safe water and there's almost no access to health services, so you're making impossible choices every day.

In terms of communications, it was really important to get critical messages out about what was happening, but also understanding the sensitivity - being factual and sensitive to various dynamics while also conveying the gravity and urgency of the situation.

[What did you learn about leadership during this deployment?](#)

The deployment provided daily reminders of how complex leadership and just working in acute emergencies can be. I expected a lot of complexity in Gaza from an outward-facing perspective: around the access, security and challenging decisions that would have to be made. One maybe doesn't anticipate the internal-facing challenges that come up in leadership roles around the level of stress that everybody's experiencing, the level of personal hardship we all deal with, and how that can manifest in work and in interpersonal relationships.

Every day, everybody's seeing a lot of misery. Everybody's sleeping badly because there are ex-

WHO's Leadership in Emergencies programme has trained people in 100 countries since its 2019 launch.

Eye health plays a vital role in reducing inequity of health care access

WE MUST ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND

Recognition of the importance of eye health has gained momentum in recent years, following the publication of three major documents, the World report on vision¹, The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health² and 'Vision for everyone' resolution³.

The World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, and global leaders, are also reviewing the universal health coverage monitoring framework and for the first time, eye health targets that cover the whole life course, from children to adults, are being considered as possible indicators.

Universal health coverage, ensuring everyone has access to health services, is specified in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a target for goal 3, good health and wellbeing. For people with vision impairment, including eye health as a measure would be a big step forward.

Whilst we wait to hear the review outcomes, Fiona Lawless, Health Policy Advisor at Sightsavers, shares her thoughts on how eye health relates to universal health coverage.

What is the prevalence of blindness and vision impairment globally?

Globally, 1.1 billion people⁴ have an untreated or preventable visual impairment.

Without urgent action, 61 million people⁵ across the world could be blind by 2050.

There are inequities: More than 85% of people with visual impairment⁶ live in low to middle income countries; women account for more than half⁷ of global blindness and visual impairment; and compared to people without disabilities, people with disabilities are three times less likely⁸ to get the health care they need.

Why is eye health so important to achieving universal health coverage?

Eye health is a universal issue. Everyone, at some point, needs eye health services. A child for schoolwork, adults to drive, or cataract surgery later in life.

Everyone, including remote communities, women, people with disabilities, should have access to the services they need. Yet availability varies between and within countries.

When we tackle avoidable visual impairment, children can learn and adults can earn. As acknowledged in the "Vision for everyone" resolution⁹, good eye health equals a ripple effect on the lives of individuals, families, communities, helping nations to thrive and reducing poverty and inequality.

Boosting eye health services is critical to achieving universal health coverage and it cannot be achieved without considering eye health across the life course.

What universal health coverage eye health indicators are being considered?

They focus on effective coverage of refractive errors, such as short-sightedness, and cataract surgery. Effective coverage means a high proportion of people have a positive treatment outcome.

They would formalise targets for countries to increase effective coverage of refractive errors by 40%, and cataract surgery by 30%, which matches targets endorsed by the World Health Assembly¹⁰.

Cataract surgery and glasses are some of the most cost-effective health interventions, with an average return on investment of US\$9.40 for each dollar¹¹ invested. Yet cataract and uncorrected refractive errors are the leading cause¹² of blindness and vision impairment respectively.

TEXT FIONA LAWLESS, SIGHTSAVERS
PHOTO SIGHTSAVERS - JOHN HEALEY



What barriers do people face in accessing health services?

Barriers can be physical, such as distances to health facilities and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Cost is another factor. Some services are offered by private providers. Where there is public provision, charges may still occur. This means low-income households may not be able to afford care.

Awareness of eye health issues also varies. People may not be aware of symptoms or services available or have misconceptions. There are reports of people fearing cataract surgery because they heard their eye will be removed.

Cultural factors, stigma, discrimination, add further barriers. Women may not be able to access services without permission from a male relative. For people with disabilities, their health may not be prioritised.

How can countries integrate eye health into universal health coverage efforts?

We hope for positive outcomes from the framework review. But regardless, we encourage countries to boost efforts to improve eye health as

part of their path towards universal health coverage. Governments are making progress, but more needs to be done.

A situational analysis of the eye health system and issue prevalence is a good first step. This will inform what is needed in each country. At a basic level, eye health needs to be part of universal health coverage policies, planning, resourcing.

Specific actions could include training general health staff, including community nurses, in basic eye care, and increasing the eye health workforce. Many regions have low numbers of ophthalmologists, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa which ranges from between one and four ophthalmologists per million people¹³. The WHO's minimum recommendation is four per million¹⁴.

Eye health services should be affordable, in accessible locations, and inclusive of people with disabilities, women, and marginalised groups. Incorporating population needs into national health financing will help. Including marginalised groups, community outreach, and a geographically spread workforce, would improve access.

Eye health should be considered across all aspects of work to improve universal health coverage, from promotion and prevention to treat-

Princess, a student in Liberia, takes an eye screening test.



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ment and rehabilitation. Referral systems may need enhancing to smooth transitions to treatment. Including eye care in essential health intervention packages, and assistive technology and rehabilitation policies will also help.

What about international organisations, what can they do to help reduce avoidable vision impairment across the world?

It would be good to see more recognition of the impact eye health has on universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. The 'Vision for everyone' resolution¹⁵ encourages the WHO and other organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund "within their respective mandates, to support global efforts to achieve Vision for Everyone in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda".

Eye health is intertwined in daily life, from independence and family life to school and work. Global efforts will have greater impact if they are integrated into existing programmes. For example, incorporating eye health into school health, employment, and gender equity projects. Funding from financial institutions and donors would also help. It would enable more countries to address vision impairment and ensure no one is left behind.

How does Sightsavers support governments and other partners with eye health?

We work with governments and other partners across Africa and Asia, to find sustainable solutions to improve health services and treat and prevent vision impairment.

This includes advocating for inclusive health policies, supporting eye examinations and operations, providing glasses, training health workers, community outreach, training teachers in basic eye health screening, projects which focus on women and people with disabilities.

Stories such as Esther from Malawi show the impact of this. Vision impairment meant she was unable to continue her fish-selling business or care for her children. She relied on her family for support. Her life became "troubled and it was squeezed" and she felt she "did not belong to this world".

Esther was diagnosed with cataracts and referred for surgery through a project funded by the UK government through UK Aid Match. After surgery, she danced and hugged her children, realising this was the first time she had seen some of their faces.

She can now support her husband with piece work, care for her children, and do household duties. For her children, particularly her eldest who missed school to care for her, she says: "It has changed a lot. They go to play. They go to school. They know that when they come back from wherever they go, they will find food prepared."

Any final thoughts that you would like to add?

Many governments are already improving eye health services and working towards universal health coverage, and we commend their efforts. But more needs to be done to ensure eye health is represented in all related planning, resourcing, and funding.

Regardless of the review outcomes, we encourage global leaders to recognise the importance of eye health, integrate it into health, education, and employment systems, and end the inequity of health services.

Eye care action will reduce the inequity of access to health services and improve universal health coverage. //

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- 2 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(20\)30488-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30488-5/fulltext)
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- 4 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(20\)30488-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30488-5/fulltext)
- 5 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(20\)30488-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30488-5/fulltext)
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Community engagement

FROM PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY HUMAN EVOLUTION AND CURRENT SOCIETIES

The momentum of engaging communities in achieving global peace, health, and development goals is growing with widespread implementation by multiple actors in collaboration with communities. Exploring various perspectives from past, present and existing developments provides further insights to find ways of collaborative platforms and strengthen effective community engagement strategies.

Community engagement is one of the most widely diffused approaches used in public health to mobilize communities' participation and empower their capacity to address community issues, improve health, well-being, socio-economic, and environmental conditions. A large body of academic research has documented numerous examples of successes of community engagement in a variety of fields, including public health, with insightful recommendations for enhancing effectiveness, sustainability, community ownership, and financing sources, among other things.

The current community engagement practices in public health in countries show¹ that Community-based organizations, Civil Societies, and Non-Governmental Organizations including the UN agencies and local government largely facilitate the implementation of activities. However, the interface between communities and stakeholders including the government sectors is characterized by an ad hoc form of engagement lacking a systematic and structural approach to ensure sustainability. Many factors contribute to this, including differences in perspectives on what constitutes community engagement and who should lead the engagement process, as well as the role of partners such as local governments.

In the run-up to the sustainable development targets by 2030, the emphasis on community engagement is heightened in major global peace, health, and developmental strategic documents offering an opportunity for practitioners to bolster community engagement.

One of the methods to build guidance on real community engagement and collaboration with

communities is to explore experiences from different perspectives including from early human evolutions and present societies to unlock the meaning of the purpose of community engagement; who should be initiating and leading the process? What motivates community members to engage? what should be the mechanism of collaboration with interested partners aiming to make a difference in the lives of communities and the role of the government?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY HUMAN EVOLUTION

The significance of looking for information to tell a story of how ancient people engaged in collective activities is to understand the meaning of the purpose of engagement, what factors motivated them to come together, and how they were engaged and sustained their collaboration.

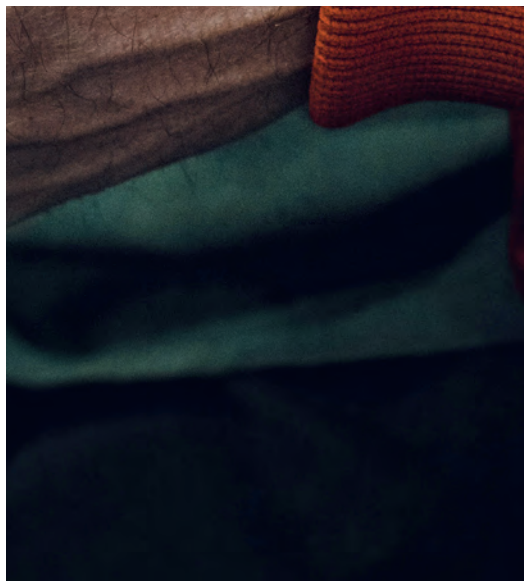
In the period of human prehistoric era, commonly known as the Paleolithic era (Old Stone Age)², survival was the primary purpose that forced ancient people to engage with one another (interdependence) and cooperatively hunt prey for food. Individuals had to possess the required physical strength, skills, and tools to join a group and collectively capture their prey. A group of 20-50 people was a hypothesized choice of size to avoid challenges that could potentially make the group vulnerable and debilitate their movement.

The level of collaboration among the group was on a small scale, facilitated through networks of kinship, stable reproductive bonds, and cooperative breeding. Much more pronounced interdependence and human collaboration were hypothesized in the context of collaborative hunting, in which individuals opted to hunt together for a greater benefit than in pursuit of small gains alone.

The process of engagement was characterized by obligatory contributions (skills, knowledge, tools), and division of labor such as chasing, ambushing, and killing prey integrated with supporting one another in the process to achieve their goal³.



With empowered communities, real local changes occur toward achieving long-term goals.



Over the years, as groups grew in size and competition between groups intensified in search of resources, changes in forms of cooperation and interaction evolved to suit emerging complex social organizations with hierarchical structures to channel cultural practices and social norms, eventually requiring people to conform to and enforce the norms.

This excerpt vividly provides clear answers on how individuals can take the lead in organizing around the issues that matter most to them for mutual gain by contributing to the cause and demonstrating empathy for those who did not meet the requirements to join the group.

In modern histories, such as in the early 19th century, Stein⁴, indicated two forms of community engagement practices. The first one was community organizing efforts by organizations, associations, or welfare agencies that provide opportunities for collaboration and engagement to address the needs of the community, such as recreation, health, and other public welfare issues. The second form of engagement was the direct engagement of individuals and families to co-solve their issues.

These forms of community engagement strategies, while existing today all over the world supported by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community-based organizations (CBOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), UN agencies and governments, etc., completely differ from the engagement practices of the ancient people, obviously because of the socio-ecological transformations.

In contrast, what has significantly influenced the role of modern communities in taking the lead about their basic and related life-saving needs could be attributed largely to the development of macro-level forces and systems (markets, industries, health systems such as family doctors, etc.), making it irrelevant for the whole of communities to engage in, for example, the production of food, cloth, etc.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT SOCIETIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF JANE, FERNEY VOLTAIRE, FRANCE

Jane Meckenzi has been living in Ferney Voltaire, France, at the Sablonnieres Apartment Block, which is home to 40-50 people, for the last 7 years. Asked about her experience of engagement with the residents of the same location, Jane said, there had not been any joint activities to collaborate with, for example, on issues that might be shared with her community residents, such as health, cleanliness, noise, security, funerals, weddings, helping people suffering from loneliness, or who got sick, accidents such as fire, etc., simply because there are systems in place that everyone can access and resolve issues if they arise.

During the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Jane said, communities were responsive to taking measures in response to the instructions announced by the government.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT SOCIETIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SELAM GETACHEW, LOKE RESIDENT, YEKA KOTEBE SUB CITY, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

Selam lives in a family of four in a residential area home to 84 households (420 People) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Asked about what common social and cultural values and issues motivated her to engage with her community members, Selam mentioned social values such as weddings, funeral services, and “*Ekub*” that communities have cherished through generations. She also mentioned community-wide issues such as peace and security, and health, including responses to public health emergencies, community development, sanitation, etc. that are addressed collaboratively with government sectors, CSOs, NGOs, etc. “*Each of these issues, she said, is taken care of by different appointed committees that are elected by members joining the platforms.*”

Selam further said that “*though the community-wide issues are coordinated by the social affairs committees that represent community members with the different stakeholders, community platforms for social values are more sustainable as they are anchored through bylaws, sustained community contributions, and very much valued as they connects us emotionally with the shared interest and well-being of our community.*”

The differences between the two community engagement stories suggest that the needs of people in advanced economies are taken care of by strong systems (though it may not mean communities live in a world of paradise, enjoying health and well being of highstand, with everything 100% equitably distributed and free of life threatening issues), while in developing societies where availability and access to services and products are limited, this has created the appetite for different organizations to engage communities in need of support. In this situation, the process of collaboration between communities and organizations rests on building relationships that are often challenged by a lack of mechanisms for ensuring community ownership, whereas in the prehistoric human story, engagement was self-initiated and self-powered.

It is also crucial to explore more perspectives on the dynamism of people in pursuit of reaching out to other people with similar interests and aspirations beyond their community. The effects of globalization are constantly influencing the conditions under which people live, work, and interact including the use of digital connectivity which is creating a complex web of interweaved communities, though with huge challenges, it offers opportunities for designing effective and sustainable approaches to community engagement. //

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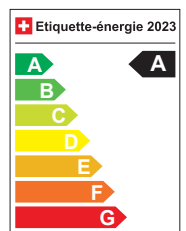
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From Eco-Anxiety to Action: Navigating Climate Emotions

WITH A SURGE IN CLIMATE-RELATED ANXIETY AND GUILT, INDIVIDUALS CONFRONT THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

Recall back to your childhood. Imagine yourself running around during recess, revelling in the joy of play, when suddenly, a sneeze interrupts your fun. You shrug it off and continue with your games. But as the day progresses, the sneezes become more frequent. Arriving home, your guardian feels your forehead – you're running a fever. With a sense of concern, they guide you to bed, ensuring you have all the essentials to combat the illness. Water, cough syrup, tissues, and a dedicated period for rest. They recognized the signs and swiftly provided the support needed to overcome the ailment and prevent it from worsening.

Similarly, as a society, we shoulder the responsibility akin to that of the guardian, but for a different fever – the Earth's. Over time, our collective actions have contributed to her rising temperatures and climate change. Through greenhouse gas emissions, the burning of fossil fuels, unsustainable industrial processes, and deforestation, we have exacerbated and added to the symptoms without working to resolve them.

Individuals and communities, consequently, now face the profound repercussions of climate change. The toll of environmental degradation is immense, and as temperatures fluctuate, ecosystems falter, and natural disasters grow more frequent and severe, we must acknowledge and respond to the crisis at hand.

Much like the guardian caring for the child, we must reflect: How can we provide essential support to our planet, transitioning from climate anxiety to hope? This requires understanding and navigating the intricate landscape of climate-related emotions and discovering strategies to foster hope and unity, paving the path towards a sustainable future for generations to come.

WEATHERING THE EMOTIONAL STORM

Over the past few years, we've witnessed a surge in anxiety disorders and depressive symptoms worldwide. Increased job insecurity and financial worries have taken a toll, making it challenging for many to prioritize mental well-being amid the struggle to survive.

In an era of instant access to news and information, people are more tuned in to global happenings than ever before. From devastating floods to raging wildfires and crippling droughts, the catastrophic effects of climate disasters are right in front of us. This heightened awareness has given rise to what's known as eco-anxiety and eco-guilt, which are contributing factors to the global mental health crisis.

Eco-anxiety stems from a deep emotional response to environmental uncertainties and their implications for the future. It often manifests as anger toward those who neglect environmental responsibility. Eco-guilt, on the other hand, arises from feelings of remorse or shame about one's own actions contributing to environmental harm, such as excessive consumption or reliance on fossil fuels.

Google searches related to eco-anxiety have skyrocketed by over 4500% between 2018 and 2023. This growing interest is particularly pronounced among young people. A study by The Lancet found that 59% of youth and young adults are deeply concerned about climate change, with 45% reporting negative impacts on their daily lives.

These concerns are far from baseless. In 2023 alone, natural disasters and extreme weather events wreaked havoc, claiming tens of thousands of lives and displacing countless others. From seismic tremors to devastating floods and landslides, the toll on human lives and infrastructure has been staggering. Take, for example, the catastrophic floods that hit Pakistan in 2022, submerging one-third of the country and affecting a staggering 33 million people, half

TEXT MARIA A. VASSILOU, FOUNDER, PHILOTIMO LIFE
PHOTOS GUY BOWDEN & ALTINAY DINC – UNSPLASH



of whom were children. The root cause of this torrential rainfall is contributed to melting glaciers. A study published in the scientific journal *Nature Communications* in February 2023 estimated that fifteen million people worldwide are at risk of glacial lake flooding.

Meanwhile, even in the depths of winter, over 100 wildfires continued to smolder on the other side of the planet. Beginning in the summer of 2023, British Columbia, Canada, endured a gruelling eight-month battle against relentless fires, with some persisting into 2024 as so-called "zombie fires." These fires, lurking beneath the surface during winter, are only detectable by small plumes of smoke billowing into the winter sky. That same summer, Quebec faced its own wildfire crisis, with them being reported to potentially disrupt the region's wildlife for years to come.

Experts warn that these extreme weather events will only become more frequent and severe as global temperatures continue to rise. The International Disaster Database EM-DAT recorded alarming increases in deaths from landslides, wildfires, and storms between 2022 and 2023, underscoring the urgent need for action.

ROOTED IN GRIEF

Eco-anxiety and guilt are just small parts of the intricate tapestry of emotions we collectively experience. Holding them together is something called eco-grief.

Also known as climate grief, eco-grief encapsulates the feeling of loss triggered by witnessing or experiencing environmental destruction. It can even manifest when we anticipate ecological decline. Recognizing this, we understand that anxiety and guilt are the symptoms of the broader grief we feel regarding climate change.

To navigate our anxieties and guilt surrounding the environment, we must delve deeper into understanding grief itself. While we often associate grief with the death of a loved one, we rarely connect it to moments of transition or change, such as weddings, promotions, or big moves. Yet, grief is an emotion experienced in various circumstances beyond death, adding to the difficulty for some people to articulate their feelings about environmental change.

Amidst the grief lies hope; understanding and acknowledging these emotions can serve as catalysts for positive change.



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Furthermore, climate grief is not evenly distributed across society; it disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. Indigenous communities, for instance, witness the devastation of their homelands due to wildfires and other climate-related disasters, while newcomer communities find themselves displaced and powerless in the face of ecological upheaval. This emotional toll exacerbates existing inequalities and injustices.

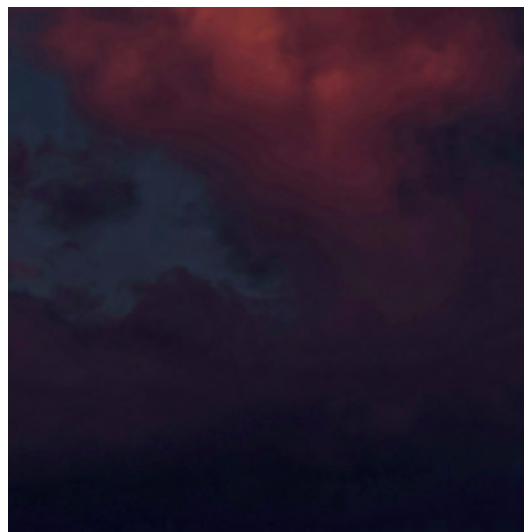
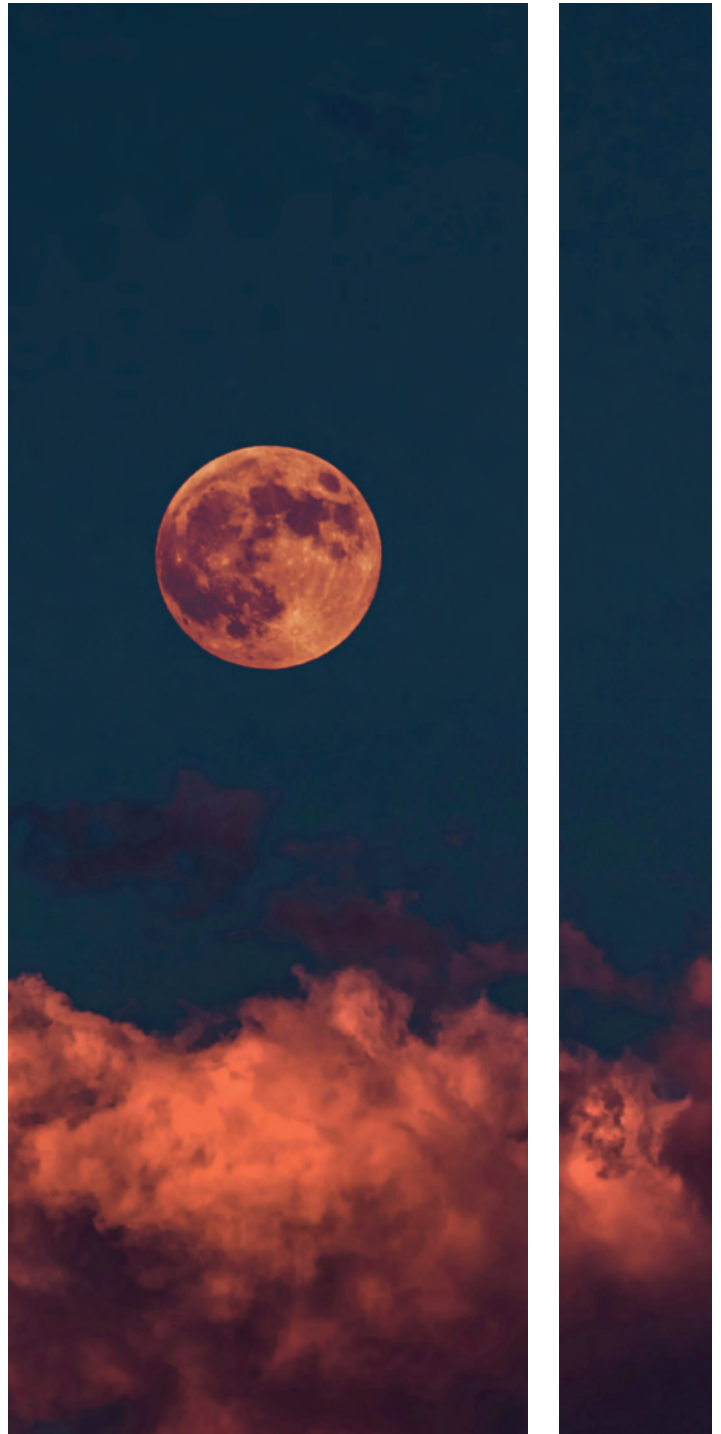
As ecological grief intensifies, so does its influence on our collective actions. Morgan Stanley's research revealed that climate fear outweighs any other contributing factor in regard to the decline in fertility rates. More people are opting out of parenthood due to concerns about the future impact of climate change on their children.

BLOOMING THROUGH GRIEF

Despite the daunting realities of climate change, there is room for optimism. With any transition comes transformation, and grief is no exception. Understanding this form of grief is vital because it allows us to brainstorm potential solutions to environmental challenges. Scientific research also suggests that stabilizing the climate and mitigating the worst impacts of climate change are still feasible.

Organizations like 350, which focuses on grassroots organizing to end the use of fossil fuels, and The Nature Conservancy, dedicated to conserving land and water globally, are working tirelessly to address the climate crisis. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) supports the global response to climate change. Many other organizations are also striving to prevent further climate damage and mitigate its impacts.

By recognizing and acknowledging these emotions, individuals and communities can channel them as catalysts for positive change, similar to the aforementioned organizations. While the emotional toll of climate change is undeniable, so is our capacity for positive change and better policies. By advocating for better policies and changes, we can transition to renewable energy sources, implement sustainable practices, and create systemic change. Together, we can pave the way toward a more sustainable and compassionate future for all generations on Earth. //



Through advocacy, policy reform, and collective action, there is a pathway toward a sustainable future.

Navigating towards sustainability

EU SPACE AND THEIR IMPACT ON A GROWING WORLD POPULATION

TEXT VASILEIOS KALOGIROU & MARIE MENARD,
EU AGENCY FOR THE SPACE PROGRAMME (EUSPA)
PHOTO SAIRA AHMED - UNSPLASH

In a world of 8 billion and counting, the challenges of sustaining our growing population amidst climate change loom large. As we confront disrupted ecosystems and escalating environmental threats, the EU Space Programme, with components like Galileo and Copernicus, offers hope. Galileo is the European Union's Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS), while Copernicus is the Earth Observation component of the European Union's space programme. By overseeing crucial aspects of our planet and spearheading innovative endeavours, they provide tangible solutions for a more optimistic future.

SUSTAINABLY SUPPORTING 8 BILLION PEOPLE WITH EU SPACE

The world population has reached a critical juncture for the Earth bringing a host of challenges, particularly in the face of climate change's far-reaching impacts. Climate change is already reshaping our planet, affecting everything from food security to the stability of our water sources. Disrupted weather patterns, intensified storms, and rising sea levels are just some of the consequences we face, threatening the livelihoods and well-being of millions around the world.

Amidst these challenges, space technology stands out as a critical ally. Going beyond exploration and weather forecasting, space plays a vital role in Earth observation. Satellites orbiting high above offer invaluable insights into our planet's condition, aiding in the monitoring of essential resources and environmental indicators.

Space technology isn't just about observation; it's about action. It enables us to track assets, quantify carbon footprints, and respond more efficiently to disasters. From navigation systems like Galileo to Earth observation programme like Copernicus, space-based solutions are driving innovation and sustainability across various sectors.

In this context, the European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) is a pivotal player. As a user-oriented operational EU Agency, EUSPA



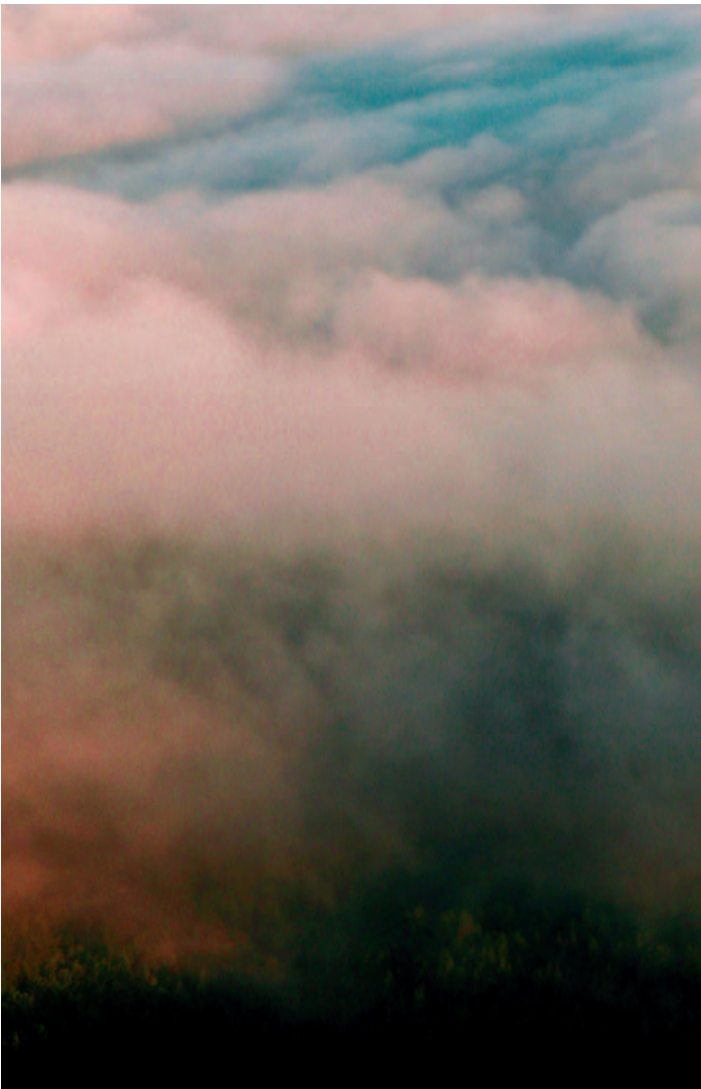
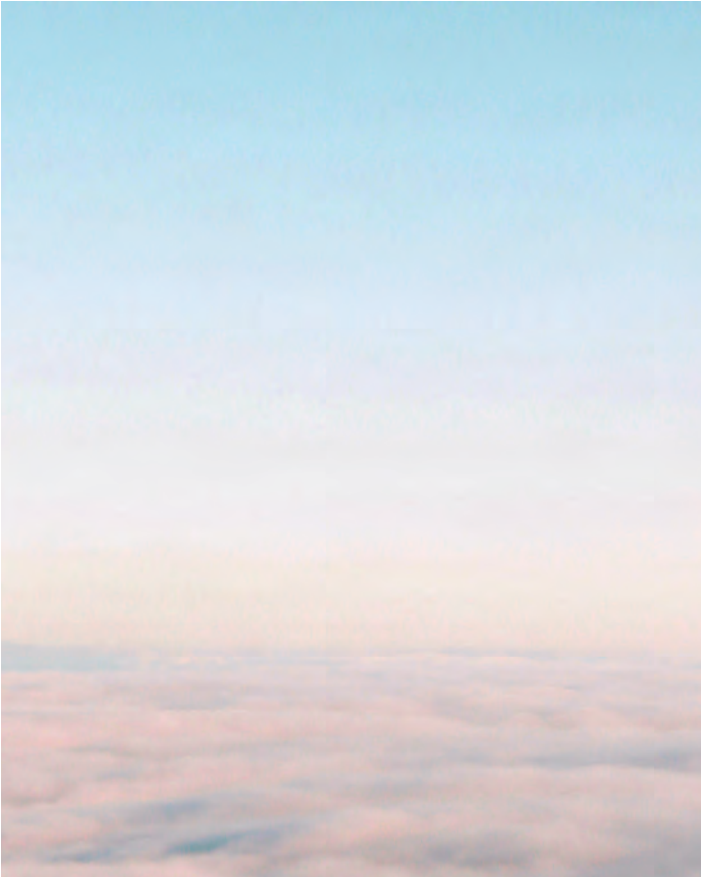
contributes to the sustainable growth, security and safety of the European Union. Collaborating with organizations like the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), it is at the forefront of leveraging space technology to address global challenges. Together, they work to harness space technology to achieve shared global goals, as outlined in their recent report titled "Contribution to the Space2030 Agenda". This report highlights the critical role of space technology in addressing the challenges posed by a growing global population and provides insights into how EU Space initiatives contribute to sustainable development.

SPACE INNOVATION BRINGS NEW MARKET SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In today's global economy, sustainability is paramount for businesses of all sizes. As companies grapple with the imperative to reduce their environmental footprint and embrace greener practices, the role of space technology becomes increasingly prominent. EUSPA is empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to take proactive steps towards green transformation and innovation.

By leveraging space-based data from Copernicus and Galileo, SMEs are equipped with a powerful toolkit to navigate the complexities of sustainability and drive meaningful change within their operations. From monitoring environmen-

The EU Space for Green
Transformation report



tal impact to optimizing resource management, EUSPA's interventions pave the way for SMEs to not only adapt to the green transformation but also to spearhead the development of new applications and projects that redefine industry standards and contribute to a more sustainable future.

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The EU Space for Green Transformation report



ADAPT TO GREEN TRANSFORMATION

In 2023, EUSPA unveiled a report titled “EU Space for Green Transformation”, highlighting the profound impact of leveraging EU space data from Copernicus and Galileo in fostering sustainability across various industries. As companies worldwide embark on their green transformation journeys, the integration of space technology emerges as a powerful catalyst for driving long-term profitability and environmental stewardship.

The journey towards sustainability demands a comprehensive examination of internal operations and supply chains to identify and address sources of pollution and waste. In this endeavour, the arsenal of tools provided by EU space data, including remote sensing, location-based services, and artificial intelligence, offers unparalleled capabilities for monitoring, tracking, evaluating, and implementing sustainable practices. What was once considered a lofty ambition now becomes a tangible and profitable reality for companies across sectors. By leveraging space technology, companies can embrace sustainable practices that not only benefit the planet but also drive profitability. This symbiotic relationship underscores the transformative potential of EU space initiatives in fostering sustainability within businesses.

From energy and road transport to aviation, agriculture, forestry, and mining, companies are leveraging space technology to optimize resource management, reduce environmental footprint, and mitigate climate change impacts. By harnessing the transformative power of EU space data, companies can not only navigate the complexities of environmental stewardship but also unlock new opportunities for innovation, growth, and long-term prosperity.

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SPEARHEAD THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PROJECTS

Under the European Commission Horizon Europe framework companies and research institutions, EUSPA is supporting companies and Research institutions in developing innovative space solutions fostering sustainability.

The project SWIFTT, for instance, provides forest managers with efficient and affordable forest threat tracking tools. By leveraging EU Copernicus satellite imagery and machine learning models, SWIFTT enables early threat detection, thereby safeguarding millions of hectares of forests and saving foresters significant monitoring costs. SWIFTT has been tested in real conditions by several end users from the forest industry, which include Fürstliches Forstamt, Groupe Coopération Forestière and the Rigas Mezia. The project anticipates monitoring and protecting up to 40 million hectares of global forests by 2030, saving foresters over €468 million in monitoring costs.

The Horizon Europe BUILDSPACE is another example. The project aims to couple terrestrial data from buildings (collected by IoT platforms, BIM solutions and others) with aerial imaging from drones equipped with thermal cameras and location annotated data from satellite services (i.e., EGNSS and Copernicus) to deliver innovative services for building and urban stakeholders and support informed decision-making towards energy-efficient buildings and climate resilient cities.

BUILDSPACE will validate and assess its services in four European cities with varying climate profiles. It will test digital twin services at the building level during the construction of a new building in Poland, while city services will be validated in Piraeus, Riga, and Ljubljana. Additionally, BUILDSPACE aims to create replication guidelines and blueprints to facilitate the adoption of its applications in building resilient cities across the European Union.

We could also present the 100KTREES project. It aims to enhance urban environments by promoting tree planting initiatives. Utilizing EU Copernicus space and in-situ data, this project maps existing trees and develops business cases for planting new ones, highlighting their myriad benefits, from pollution absorption to mental health improvements.

ACTIVATING ENTREPRENEURS FOR CLEANER OCEANS

In the maritime domain, EUSPA and the European Commission created under the Entrepreneurship scheme of the EU Space Programme, CASSINI, the Prize for digital space applications. Dedicated to seeking innovative solutions to detect, monitor, and remove plastics from oceans and waterways, it has sparked a wave of entrepreneurial activity. With an estimated 26 million tonnes of plastic ending up in the ocean annually, initiatives like CASSINI are vital in addressing this pressing issue. Through leveraging space-based technologies such as Copernicus and Galileo, winning applications like the Coastal Marine Litter Observatory by SCIDRONES, Eyes on Plastic by EOMAP, and Ocean Plastic Alert and Tracking by GEOMATYS are paving the way for cleaner oceans. These solutions not only detect and monitor plastic pollution but also empower authorities and NGOs to take targeted action, highlighting the transformative potential of space-based entrepreneurship in tackling marine plastic pollution.

Amidst the formidable challenges of climate change and a burgeoning global population, the EU Space Programme, anchored by its vital components Galileo and Copernicus, emerges as a linchpin of hope and progress. Several European Union initiatives embody a commitment to leveraging space technology for the betterment of humanity. Through the monitoring of Earth's vital signs and the inception of pioneering projects, the EU Space Programme is at the forefront of addressing global challenges and steering us towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. At the heart of this transformative journey lies the European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), deeply committed to driving innovation and sustainability for the benefit of present and future generations. //

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Tragédie de la beauté alpine

POÈME



La beauté des Alpes au magnifique bleu glaciale est bien connue comme un virus qui infecte les jeunes, sportifs, intelligents, prometteurs, prospères, optimistes, curieux et avides de découvrir le monde fantastique et de plonger dans l'océan de mystère offert aux sommets au-dessus de 3000 mètres d'altitude. Ceux qui ont survécu sont des chanceux, riches d'une expérience incroyable, mais beaucoup d'entre eux ont fini dans la vingtaine dans le cimetière du village pittoresque de Zermatt où leurs parents ont mis fin à leurs espoirs dans l'ombre de la vie d'enfants sacrifiée pour la beauté emblématique des hauteurs irrésistibles des montagnes.

L'intention de ce poème est de sensibiliser au danger de la vie caché dans la beauté innocente et à la nécessité d'éviter la mort inutile de jeunes qui devraient vivre une vie décente au lieu de laisser de jeunes ossements dans les ravins des Alpes. Profitez de la montagne mais soyez prudent et respectez les limites et les alertes de sécurité!

Le mystère des sommets alpins

La joie envahit les Alpes.
Sur les ailes de Pégase
les souvenirs du royaume
des neiges, dans cette ambiance
dansent la valse
avec les flocons de l'enfance.

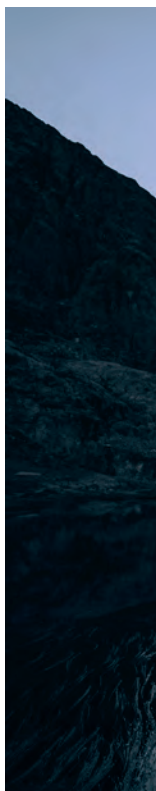
Parmi les pins - des étincelles de silence.
Les perles givrées
du collier des émois
brillent
sous les aiguilles dorées
du mélèze centenaire
enlacées par la neige qui scintille
ce collier raconte un conte de fées.

D'une voix crépitante de glacier
les Alpes murmurent leurs aspirations
de jeunesse
le silence des oiseaux est caché
dans un soupir de l'obscurité
qui fit fondre de nombreux désirs
et promesses
dans le mirage des rayons du soleil éclatant
au milieu de l'éventail de glace brillant.

Le bleu vif lumineux
de la paix glaciale
invite les âmes des amoureux
à la danse de l'éternité cérémoniale
pendant que le nordet joue
sa symphonie de l'intangibilité
des sommets montagneux escarpés.

//

La beauté magique des Alpes attire de jeunes gens, intelligents, prospères et passionnés qui ne connaissent pas le secret d'un court chemin entre la vie et la mort, caché dans le bleu glaciale.



TEXT IVANA KNEZEVIC, WHO
PHOTO ROBERT RICHARZ - UNSPLASH

Democratizing the Art World

AN INTERCONNECTED (DIGITAL) FUTURE

In the digital era, the internet emerges as an essential bridge fostering global connection and cultural exchange, heralding a future that celebrates creativity and embraces the diversity of over 8 billion individuals worldwide. The rise of 3D digital environments has catalyzed a shift from passive to active engagement with the cultural tapestry that surrounds us, signifying a momentous step towards the democratization of art and culture. This digital transformation, akin to the revolutions seen in the Music and Film industries through platforms like Spotify and Netflix, has not only redefined access and participation in cultural experiences but created countless opportunities for creators worldwide. This is a testament for the transformative potential of digital tools in enhancing how content is created, shared, and experienced. While these advancements highlight a movement towards democratization and increased accessibility into arts and culture, the art galleries, museums, and fine-arts institutions are lagging behind such evolution.

According to a recent report published by ARTnews, attendance at national museums and galleries in the UK has plummeted by 25% since the pandemic, despite the easing of restrictions. The report released by Fahim Ali, focuses on data from a prestigious 15-museum network including iconic institutions such as the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the V&A, and the Tate museums, reveals a stark reality. During 2022-2023, the number of physical visitors dropped by 14 million visits compared to 2018-2019. (ArtNews, 2024)

On the other hand, online sales have seen a sharp increase during the pandemic; auction houses strengthening their digital departments, promoting online sales and streaming events. It then comes as no surprise that the combined number of online-only auctions by Christie's, Sotheby's, and Phillips nearly tripled in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 2019, peaking at over 600. Meanwhile, online sales of Sotheby's reached just under 600 million U.S. dollars in 2022, the second-highest figure reported by the company. (Statista, 2024)

THE LIMITATIONS OF A 2DIMENSIONAL WORLD

A significant issue in the art world lies in the vast amount of artwork consigned to storage, unseen by the public due to space constraints. Studies indicate that up to 70% of gallery artwork and a staggering 99% in museums languish in storage. Digitalization emerges as a solution to this dilemma, employing technologies like 3D web platforms, virtual reality (VR), and digital twins of buildings to showcase and preserve these artworks in immersive online experiences.

Traditional 2D interfaces struggle to capture the depth and vibrancy of our three-dimensional world, hindering the aesthetic richness of cultural expressions and landmarks. This limitation not only poses challenges in accurately representing diverse cultures but also hampers effective global collaboration. While museums like Guggenheim in New York City and Louvre in Paris provided virtual tours for their visitors, 360 scans are not a sustainable solution due to limited interactions available and the inability to click, zoom, and explore the artwork.

The push for more immersive, genuine connections is evident, leading to a transition toward 3D digital environments that promise a more engaging interaction with the complexities of our world and its diverse cultures, bridging the gap between creators and audiences while addressing the constraints of physical space.

THE LEAP INTO 3D: A TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

Driven by advancements in computing, graphics rendering, and virtual reality the transition to 3D digital spaces marks a profound technological evolution. This leap forward enriches the digital representation of physical spaces, artworks, and cultural artifacts with unparalleled detail and realism, transforming education, art, and collaboration. Educational experiences become immersive, allowing people to virtually visit historical sites or dive into complex works of art. Artists gain a new, boundless medium for expression, enabling audiences worldwide to engage with their work in dynamic ways. Collaboration is reimaged, as virtual environments mimic the sense of phys-

TEXT HEIDI HERLER & ANDREI FISCA, ANASAEA
PHOTOS ANASAEA



ical presence and interaction, overcoming geographical limitations. For artists outside major art hubs like Paris, New York, and London, gaining recognition and exposure can be challenging. However, physical location shouldn't determine an artist's success. Digital platforms provide a global stage for artists to showcase their work, breaking geographical barriers. Modern sharing techniques via social media and global e-commerce further democratize art access, benefiting both artists and art lovers alike.

UNITING CULTURES WITH IMMERSIVE SPACES

Immersive 3D environments represent a transformative shift in cultural exchange and understanding, offering unprecedented opportunities for global connection and collaboration. These dynamic spaces transcend physical barriers, providing virtual museums and galleries that transport users to distant cultures and heritage sites. Moreover, they serve as collaborative workspaces that bridge continents, enabling real-time interaction and cooperation among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This innovative approach not only facilitates professional and educational advancement but also nurtures personal relationships and mutual respect across borders. By leveraging immersive

3D technologies, cultural dialogue and cooperation become possible to anyone with access to the Internet, and everything from storage can be once again on display; indefinitely.

THE VISION OF ANASAEA

Despite the abundance of talent in the art world, access and representation remain unequal and opaque. Art must be democratized, made accessible, and accompanied by transparent business practices that prioritize artists' interests. Starting from the premise the world around us is a 3Dimensional Space, ANASAEA was designed to create, host, and provide 3D Spaces that are globally accessible and suitable for multimedia content display. The name ANASAEA is actually an acronym made of the first later of each content. Art democratisation, cultural heritage preservation, and global accessibility are the core pillars of ANASAEA, making this unique platform a solution for transitioning to a 3Dimensional Internet. From pre-made templates to custom-built digital twins, the digital space is not subject of physical limitations. Multimedia content such as pictures, videos, and sculptures not only decorate the immersive 3D Spaces provided by ANASAEA but they spark the dialogue between members of different cultures and backgrounds.

hymne

Toute la sérénité de la nature
dans un flacon.

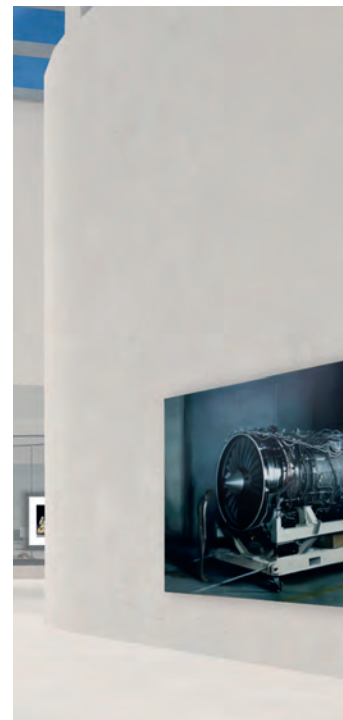
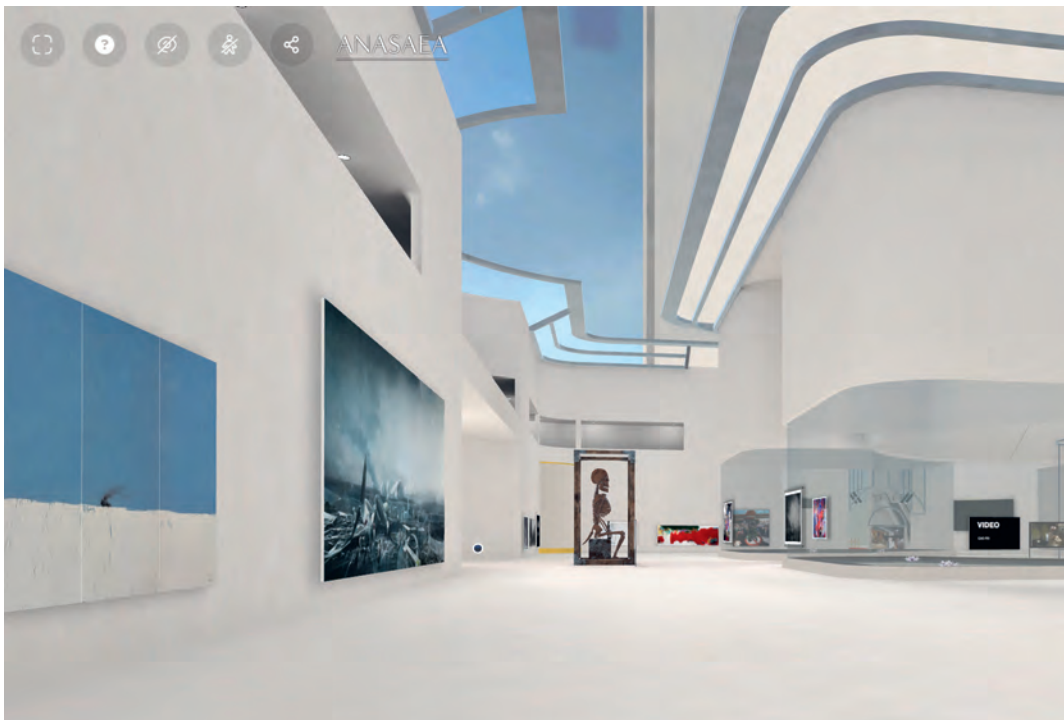


N°2 Morphée

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Global Impact and the Path Moving Forward
The shift to immersive digital spaces profoundly impacts global connectivity and cultural exploration. These dynamic environments dissolve geographical boundaries, enabling individuals to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives from anywhere in the world. Through virtual museums and galleries, people can immerse themselves in the art and heritage of distant cultures, preserving and celebrating cultural treasures like never before. Moreover, these spaces empower new stakeholders to participate in cultural preservation, fostering collaboration and inclusivity. As we embrace immersive 3D technologies, we unlock endless possibilities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding, paving the way for a more interconnected and culturally vibrant global community.

A CALL TO EMBRACE THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION

As we delve into the transformative potential of immersive 3D digital spaces, a compelling call to action emerges: get involved and embrace the digital evolution. This call extends to all individuals, from artists to policymakers, as we navigate this new era of boundless connectivity. Platforms like ANASAEA serve as catalysts for change, offering pathways to a world where cultural exchange flourishes and heritage preservation becomes a shared endeavor. Let us embrace this evolution with curiosity and openness, championing initiatives that foster connection, understanding, and unity across diverse human experiences. In doing so, we shape a more vibrant, inclusive, and harmonious future for all. Join this wonderful journey today! //

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Embracing double challenges

TOASTING DOUBLE AWARDS

My first experience of Toastmasters was at the United Nations in Geneva some years ago. I attended a couple of events as a guest. Each time, I cried. I also ended up nursing a rather sore belly. Each time, I emerged feeling lighter...for joy, from having laughed heartily. Those evenings turned out to be comedy nights and left an indelible impression on me. Whilst every meeting is different, I still hold those memories dear.

A LEAP OF FAITH

After much deliberation, last year, I finally joined Toastmasters in Zurich where I now live. Nine months into my journey, I was invited to represent my local club in the annual speech contest. I felt honoured. I would be competing in not one, but two categories: speech evaluation and table topics. It did not matter that I had only delivered a few evaluations and table topics. It sounded like a novel, fun experience. So I gladly took up the gauntlet.

EMBRACING THE THRILL OF NEW CHALLENGES

On the eventful contest night, as I stood next to seasoned competitors, I could have succumbed to nerves. However, I chose to embrace it as an opportunity. The more chances I get to practise, the more I get to improve. As Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics said: *"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part."*

Victory lies not only in awards and accolades, but also the courage to participate. I believe that, as we navigate the speedy AI revolution, cultivating a growth mindset and readiness to approach challenges with collectedness becomes essential. This contest was a great opportunity for me to test my mettle.

That Friday evening, my passion for continuous learning, personal development and the sheer thrill of embracing new challenges kept me focused on the task at hand. All I had to do was be myself, try my best, apply all my transferable skills, knowledge and experience. And see what happens.

FIVE MINUTES IS ALL YOU GET!

In fact, I had to be both agile and creative. For the evaluation speech part, a test speaker spoke for seven minutes. Then we, the evaluation contestants, were taken into an adjacent room. We were given five minutes... yes, just five minutes... to prepare an evaluation. At regular meetings in my local club, we have the luxury of taking up to half an hour to prepare for an evaluation over dinner. We had time to think. Here, five minutes was all we got. We had to think fast. The lots had been drawn. I was the first to be called up to present my assessment of the test speech. There was no room for mulling.

I walked back into the room and stood in front of the audience. I gingerly put my notes away. You see, one gets brownie points for not using notes. At this stage, I figured that I needed all the brownie points I could earn... So I took a calculated risk.

The only thing was that I sincerely hoped that I would remember to address all the points I wanted to make...or at least think of valid comments to make on the spot. And convey them in a compelling way without any filler words (like 'em', 'ah', 'er'...). One also earns brownie points for not using filler words...

I took a breath in and a moment to ground myself. From my mentor's advice and leveraging from my yoga practice, this helps me to anchor myself to the earth, draw stability and strength. The three minutes I had to evaluate also went by quickly. I managed to wrap up shortly after the red card flashed to signal that I was approaching the maximum allotted time. A round of applause came as I handed back to the contest chair.

The bigger reward was being able to sit and watch the other contestants present their evaluation speeches on the same test speech. It was fascinating to see the diversity of styles, how each evaluator delivered their analysis, pointed out areas where the test speaker excelled and highlighted areas for improvement. The judges also award brownie points for giving feedback in an encouraging way that elevates the speaker. Great practice for applying these techniques at work or in one's personal life!



Courage to speak up.

A FEW SECONDS IS ALL YOU GET!

After a short comfort break, the Table Topics contest round started. In this round, all participants were taken out of the contest room. As each person's turn came to speak, they were called in one by one. The same question was asked of each contestant. For this part, one has a few seconds to reflect on the question before responding. To be honest, there is really not much time for preparation for this impromptu part. One simply has to think on the feet. Lighting fast.

I was the third person to be called up. The prompt was: *"There are two kinds of people..."*

So I had to give a short speech about that. I tried to give an intelligent response...Mine was structured around positive vs negative people. Then I drew in concrete examples about how they reacted during the pandemic. I brought my speech to life with some gestures and vocal variety, added a splash of humour along the way, and wrapped up within 30 seconds of the red card being flashed. Another round of applause ensued.

Again, the biggest treat was sitting down to watch the other contestants' response to the same question. It was a great pleasure to witness how they spontaneously weaved their personality and eloquence into crafting compelling stories. It was pure entertainment, with healthy doses of humour thrown in.

FIRST-TIMER, DOUBLE CHALLENGE, DOUBLE AWARDS

At the end, the contest chair delivered the verdict on the judges' votes. I was pleasantly surprised, deeply honoured and thrilled to receive No. 1 awards in both the *'speech evaluation'* and *'table topics'* categories. The brownie points certainly helped. And so did a very healthy dose of beginner's luck!

As I integrate and get ready to compete at the divisional level, here are reflections on my experience so far.

MY TAKEAWAYS

Inspiration Abounds: The spellbinding techniques and motivational speeches delivered by my esteemed fellow participants truly inspired me. I learned much from observing every one of them in action and by what they shared.

Enriched Experience: Everyone played a role in supporting the event. Hosted in a hybrid context, the work that went on behind the scenes cannot be underestimated. The hybrid audience made for an aptly modern experience.

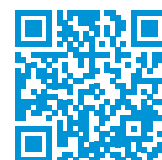
Deep gratitude: I am deeply thankful to all the judges, my distinguished Zuriberg Toastmasters Club, my mentor Roland Straub for his unwavering support, the committee and members for their much valued feedback and vote of confidence.

MORAL OF THE STORY?

There's a first time for everything! We just need passion, readiness to embrace new challenges and a supportive network! For those of you out there who are up for your next challenge, may it inspire you to embrace challenges with a growth mindset. //

LEARN +

Zuriberg
Toastmasters
club



Toastmasters
International



Forget the obsolete notion of a “just war”

(PART I)



War is a man-made catastrophe that almost always can be prevented by timely negotiation and compromise. Prevention fails because of poor diplomacy, absence of confidence-building measures, intransigence, bad faith, or an aggressive *animus dominandi*. Once unleashed, war becomes unpredictable and often yields other results that those expected by the belligerent parties.

Retrospectively, it is easy to see where mistakes were made that resulted in adversaries stumbling into war. We can understand how the outbreak of any war could have been prevented, including the First and Second World Wars, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, the Ukraine War, and the Gaza war. But very few politicians have ever learned from the mistakes of prior armed conflicts, few have learned anything at all from history. They live in their own worlds and believe their own propaganda, while rejecting the arguments of their adversaries as propaganda.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

What we think we know about history is mostly a form of literature akin to politicized fiction. Histories are written to legitimize the authority of the powerful, to justify the result of the wars and apportion blame as necessary for the desired political narrative. This entails the instrumentalization of “fake news” and “fake law”, as well as the suppression of crucial information which would destroy the coherence of the concocted historical narrative. Any first-year history student learns not to rely on politicized narratives and how to apply methodology and critical thinking in evaluating the explanations given for the occurrence of certain events, e.g. financial crises, famines, wars.

The ideal of history-writing proposed by the 19th century German historian Leopold von Ranke, according to whom a historian should “simply” write history “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” – how it actually happened – is not that simple, and has never been achieved. This has both objective and subjective reasons.

Personally, I would propose seven C’s of history-writing: chronology, context, comprehensiveness, coherence, causality, comparison, and last but not least, *cui bono* (Cicero, *Pro Milone*, who benefits?). The best approach to history is not to take it as dogma or divine revelation, but as a partial description of events that have occurred. The narrative that joins the dots and collects the facts into a half-way coherent story, reflects the *a priori*s of the writer and the necessity to summarize and condense, since the mass of information is overwhelming.

Writing history entails selecting facts and ordering them in a coherent way. Objectivity is desirable, but seldom achieved. The worst histories are those that pretend to explain the origins of a war, e.g. the Peloponnesian war, the Punic wars, the Crusades, the Thirty Years’ War, the Napoleonic wars, the Opium Wars etc. No historian writes in a vacuum. Notwithstanding a vague commitment to record the truth for future generations, historians write for their peers, for a particular generation of women and men who want to believe certain things and at the same time forget others. Already Julius Caesar noted in his *De bello civile* (2,27,2) “*quae volumus ea credimus libenter*”, we tend to believe what we want to believe.

War histories can be fascinating to read, but it is advisable to receive them *cum grano salis* – with a grain of salt. It is best to rely on multiple sources, not just the histories written by the victors, but also the unwritten histories in the archives or the memoirs of the vanquished political and military leaders. Indeed, it is most revealing to read the memoirs of Confederate General Robert E. Lee¹, or German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein’s *Verlorene Siege*².

HOW TO PREVENT ARMED CONFLICT?

In order to prevent war, it is appropriate to rely on mediation by neutral third parties. Recently the importance of having neutral States has been disregarded and the tendency has been to divide the world in Manichaean fashion into good and bad states and forcing formerly neu-

tral States like Switzerland to choose camps. This is an ominous development, bearing in mind that Switzerland has in the past facilitated high-level meetings between rivals. The erosion of Swiss neutrality has also impacted its credibility as an honest broker.

Confidence-building among nations is the best prevention against war, but this requires the availability of forums to facilitate dialogue and compromise. Precisely that is the vocation of the United Nations, and surely the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 proves that apocalyptic conflicts can be avoided and the grievances solved through the good offices of a Secretary General like U Thant, and thanks to the efforts of the United Nations as facilitator in reaching a *quid pro quo*.

The tools of diplomacy are there, but most of all what is needed is good faith and the readiness to consider compromise and a *modus vivendi* for all. When we think of recent wars, we realize that all too often the parties to the conflict – or at least one side – were self-righteous, rigid and intransigent, lacking a mindset conducive to making a pragmatic deal. History also shows that we have what I would call a tradition of cheating, a culture of lying to the other party³. This augurs badly for any sustainable agreement, because no one can trust what the other party says or even commits to in writing. We are faced with a crisis of trust and credibility.

APOLOGIA FOR WAR

There is no satisfactory excuse for war, but there are plenty of politicians, journalists and historians who concoct disingenuous narratives. I speak of an open society of professional and amateur apologists.⁴

For millennia those who have held power have also aspired to greater power. We humans are predators and aggression is in our DNA. Military “virtues” are hailed as glorious, honourable, noble. Patriotism⁵ is frequently defined in connection with war. In history class we are taught to honour the memory of war heroes. Glory is somehow associated more with war than with great achievements in medicine, music or literature.

Religion has also played a role in justifying aggression. Many civilizations have had a “God of War”, whether we call him Mars or *Dominus Deus Sabaoth* (Άγιος, άγιος, άγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ), Lord of the Armies. Priests have blessed cannons and

guns, tsarist Russian armies went to war under the motto “*God with us*” *Съ нами Богъ!*, similarly Nazi Germany “*Gott mit uns*”. The appeal to God is intended to lend credence to the official propaganda that we are the “good guys” and that our enemies are necessarily the “bad guys”. Sometimes similar words have been inscribed on bombs. The level of superstition – and blasphemy – is considerable. In any event, the appeal to God is tantamount to saying that ours is the only just cause and thus we have the *right* to wage the “good war”.

THE JUST WAR THEORY

There is, of course, an old debate about what are the conditions of a “just war” (*bellum justum*). Here we must make a distinction between a king’s or president’s decision to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and the universal rules of war, laid down in treaties, sometimes euphemistically called “international humanitarian law” (*ius in bello*), laid down in the Hague and Geneva Conventions.

In many cases there is an aggressor and a victim, but this is not always the case, since the complexities of international relations spread the blame among many players. Surely it is simplistic to claim that the only guilty party is the one who fires the first bullet, notwithstanding menaces and provocations⁶ that may have preceded that first bullet.

There are wars in which all parties are guilty of egregious injustices and have no right to claim moral superiority over the others. And even a “victim” of aggression may, by its own provocations and sabre-rattling, have contributed to the outbreak of hostilities. And all parties, by grossly violating the *ius in bello*, lose all pretence to engaging in a “just war”. Even what could have been a case of legitimate self-defence may degenerate into serial war crimes, crimes against humanity, even genocide. (end of part I) //

1 <https://archive.org/details/memoirsrobertel02wriggoog>

2 <https://archive.org/details/verlorene-siege>

3 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2022/01/28/a-culture-of-cheating-on-the-origins-of-the-crisis-in-ukraine/>

4 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/how-write-iraq-war-apologia/317167/>

5 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/12/17/what-is-patriotism/>

6 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2023/05/10/provocation-is-not-an-innocent-act/>

Stolen Focus

WHY YOU CAN'T PAY ATTENTION BY JOHANN HARI

This thoughtful and intriguing book about problems with attention is written partly from the perspective of a personal journey and partly as a serious scholarly investigation. The author, Johann Hari, is a famous journalist and Cambridge graduate who was increasingly alarmed by his own personal inability to focus or read a book uninterrupted (as well as by the attention problems and screen addiction of his then-teenage nephew). In his research for his latest book, Johann Hari conducted over 250 scientific studies and conducted a large number of interviews about various causes. He identified and analysed twelve leading causes of many people's growing inability to focus for sustained periods, as well as the explosion in diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) among both adults and children.

The author identifies and explores twelve factors which are acting to hinder and harm our ability to pay attention:

- The increase in speed, switching and filtering of our attention;
- The crippling of our flow states;
- The rise of physical and mental exhaustion (including lack of sleep);
- The collapse of sustained reading;
- The disruption of mind wandering;
- The rise of technology that can track and manipulate you;
- The rise of cruel optimism (considering individual responsibility versus systemic factors);
- The surge in stress and hyper-vigilance;
- Our deteriorating diets;
- Rising pollution;
- The rise of ADHD;
- Physical and psychological confinement of children.

I found it immensely interesting (as well as very reassuring) to explore an authoritative viewpoint about several social trends I have noticed recently and not felt very comfortable with personally.

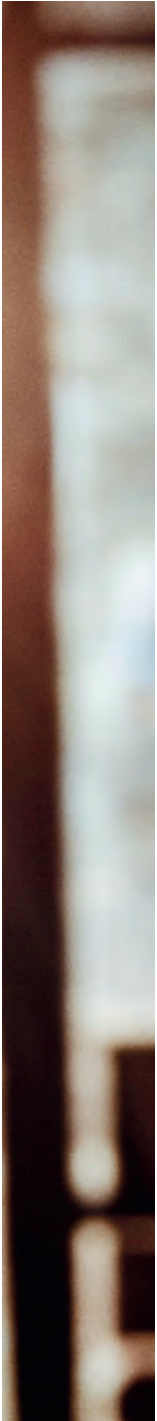
For example, we are taught at school and in the workplace that productivity is *always* good and that multitasking is beneficial and saves time. In

fact, some of my best ideas and insights come to me at weekends out in nature, far from any workplace or library. Johann Hari suggests that constant productivity in the workplace may not always be possible, let alone beneficial – indeed, relaxation, downtime and 'mind wandering' are vital parts of learning, and essential for us to derive deeper meaning from information we have read or heard, and link up or make parallels with other facts.

And contrary to my naïve belief, multitasking may not always be good. Johann Hari cites evidence that there are very real costs to multitasking, including: costs to switching (greater cognitive burden, the time needed to refocus after a break); mistakes in switching/reorienting; drain on creativity – the lost ability to make connections. Indeed, sometimes multitasking can be fatal – the distraction of car drivers by smartphones has become a real issue. Johann Hari cites data that as many as one in five car accidents may be due to driver distraction, while the average U.S. office worker is distracted roughly every three minutes on average (p.37), and rarely gets an hour without distraction (p.38).

The book covers some aspects of social media (the importance of advertising and clickbait, dopamine stimulation, digital addiction, risks of over-simplification and how outrageous content may travel farther, faster). Johann Hari quotes Canadian professor Marshall McLuhan that the "medium is the message". Users of X (formerly Twitter) are led to believe that the world is simple and can be summarized in a limited number of characters, and that readers should applaud and agree with their statements. From Facebook, we learn to self-publicize our lives in a form of edited highlights, acknowledging that our 'friends' are often anything but friends. From Instagram, we learn that visual appearance is important and the only thing that matter is how something or someone looks.

In contrast, from books, we learn that the world is complex. It takes time and effort to understand an issue, including from someone else's point of view, their outlook or experiences. Reading novels and autobiographies can teach us empathy, and the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (as well as grammar, vocabulary,



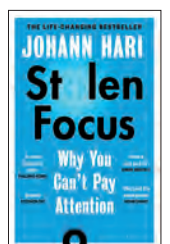
the ability to express ourselves and to concentrate). And ultimately, whether someone agrees with you or not is no real measure of whether you are right or wrong – actions, situations and scenarios can be considered from different points of view.

Johann Hari also discusses the issue of personal responsibility versus systemic factors for adverse behaviours. For example, he quotes evidence that as many as 95% of all diets ultimately fail, given that many of us are now leading more sedentary lives eating processed foods with added fats and sugars. An often temporary diet may not change our lifestyle, especially when the broader environment is pushing us to gain weight. And yet we are often told, usually by empowered people in privileged positions, that “the problem isn’t the system, the problem lies with you”.

Johann Hari suggests that we risk losing our collective ability to focus as a species, including on the pressing problems of our time, such as climate change and ecosystem collapse. All in all, this was a fascinating book from a fascinating author at the peak of his abilities that I found deeply thought-provoking, as well as inspiring. It opened my eyes to wider trends and social changes underway, and got me thinking about my personal responsibilities and what I can do in response to help. And also, what I can do to safeguard and preserve my attention, despite pressures on my time from a growing set of distractions. //



Losing your ability to focus? Want to know why you can no longer concentrate?



Au pied de la « montagne sacrée »

SOUDAN 3/4

Les grandes civilisations antiques du Soudan ont pu compter sur l'agriculture pour prospérer et construire de majestueux tombeaux et temples en l'honneur de leurs dieux, rois, reines et membres de la noblesse. De cette fièvre bâtisseuse sont sorties de terre quelque 255 pyramides, soit plus du double de celles érigées en l'Égypte voisine.

Les mystérieux pharaons de Nubie, dans l'actuel Soudan, ont érigé des centaines de tombeaux et de temples rivalisant avec ceux du Caire. A la mort de Ramsès II, en 1213 av. J.-C., la puissance des souverains égyptiens commença à faiblir; l'Égypte s'enfonça dans la crise et le trône finit par tomber aux mains des Nubiens. C'est alors qu'entrèrent en scène les pharaons noirs qui ouvrirent une fructueuse période de renaissance qui dura près d'un siècle à partir de 747 avant notre ère.

Premier prince du royaume de Koush à être couronné pharaon, Piânkhy fut le fondateur officiel de la XXV^e dynastie, laquelle continua d'œuvrer dans ce sens avec quatre successeurs, dont le plus actif, Taharqa. Pharaon noir de 690 à 664 avant notre ère et également roi de Napata, honoré du titre de « pharaon des Deux Terres », c'était un redoutable guerrier qui mit à genoux les ennemis de l'Égypte, tels les Assyriens. Mais en 656 avant notre ère, sous les assauts répétés de ces derniers, Memphis tombe et Thèbes est mise à sac. Le dernier représentant de la dynastie, Tanoutamon, s'enfuit à Napata, au pied du Djebel Barkal, cédant le trône à une nouvelle lignée égyptienne.

MAJESTUEUX DJEBEL BARKAL

Trois heures de route seront nécessaires pour rallier Vieux Dongola (voir le newSpecial précédent) à Karima, petite ville surplombée par la « montagne sacrée », le Djebel Barkal. Ce majestueux massif tabulaire en grès avec ses parois verticales hautes d'une centaine de mètres domine le désert environnant. Se détachant, un énorme éperon rocheux semble surveiller la rive du Nil tel un cobra dressé, animal censé pro-

téger les dynasties pharaoniques. Classé au patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco, le Djebel Barkal était le lieu le plus saint de la Nubie antique et, aujourd'hui encore, on y respire une envoûtante atmosphère d'éternité.

Karima est l'héritière de Napata, ville de l'ancienne Nubie, autrefois capitale de la XXV^e dynastie nubienne et, après sa chute en 663 av. J.-C., capitale du royaume de Koush. Pillée en 593 av. J.-C. par les Égyptiens, la capitale koushite sera transférée plus au sud, à Méroé.

Aujourd'hui seuls quelques vestiges et colonnes subsistent du temple dédié au dieu Amon construit à Napata sous le règne de Thoutmôsis III, puis celui de Ramsès II. Soumis au vandalisme et au pillage à plusieurs reprises, c'était pourtant l'un des plus somptueux sanctuaires consacrés au « Seigneur du Trône des Deux Terres ». A proximité, creusé au sein de la montagne sacrée, le temple de Mout renferme de splendides peintures, dont la représentation du roi Taharqa et de la reine Amanitakte face au dieu Amon et à la déesse Mout. Femme d'Amon, Mout était considérée comme la reine de tous les dieux.

Rompant la tradition établie d'abord sur les sites d'El-Kurru et de Nuri, puis à Méroé, Napata a accueilli des enterrements royaux, comme en témoigne un groupe de pyramides royales méroïtiques datant du I^{er} siècle apr. J.-C. qui s'élèvent en marge du Djebel Barkal.

NÉCROPOLES DES ROIS ET REINES DE NAPATA

A quelques kilomètres du Djebel Barkal se situe la vaste nécropole antique d'El-Kurru. Ce site d'une grande importance utilisé entre la fin du IX^e siècle et le VII^e siècle avant notre ère témoigne de l'évolution des sépultures koushites, des premières tombes à fosse remontent au Néolithique en Nubie jusqu'aux imposantes pyramides en pierre dotées de chambres funéraires souterraines. El-Kurru, la première nécropole des rois et reines de Napata, abrite plusieurs dizaines de sépultures, certaines sous un simple

Parachevant un décor déjà riche en vestiges, deux groupes de pyramides s'élèvent en marge du Djebel Barkal.



Le Djebel Barkal, cœur politique et religieux du royaume de Napata.

tumulus de pierres, d'autres dans un mastaba de briques crues ou encore sous une pyramide. Les diverses expéditions de fouilles ont permis de mettre au jour des vestiges de bijoux en or et pierres semi-précieuses, des pointes de flèches finement ouvragées et des récipients en céramique dénotant la richesse de l'endroit.

Mais les découvertes les plus extraordinaires ont été celles des tombes de la reine Qalhata et du roi Tanoutamon. Présent sur le site, le gardien des lieux nous fera l'honneur de nous ouvrir ces sépultures enfouies sous le sable et auxquelles on accède par un escalier escarpé. Les parois des tombes de la reine et de son fils sont ornées de splendides peintures polychromes et sont extrêmement bien conservées après avoir traversé tant de siècles.

Après l'inhumation de Taharqa à Nuri, on essaya de faire revenir le noyau du culte mortuaire dans le site traditionnel d'El-Kurru, mais sans succès. Nuri deviendra donc la nécropole royale de la ville voisine de Napata, capitale du Royaume de Koush construite sur la rive opposée du Nil.

Proches d'une vaste zone désertique et vallonnée jonchée de troncs d'arbres pétrifiés, répertoriées par l'Unesco sur la liste du patrimoine mondial, les pyramides de Nuri se dressent vers le ciel proche du barrage de Merowe, deuxième plus grand barrage sur le Nil après celui d'Assouan. On comptait autrefois plus de 70 pyramides; il n'en reste désormais que 20 dont la plus ancienne, celle de Taharqa, est également la plus imposante jamais découverte au Soudan. Le site est relativement bien conservé, préservé du pillage en raison de la montée des eaux du Nil qui ont obstrué bon nombre d'entrées de chambres funéraires souterraines. C'est ainsi que les archéologues ont dû se transformer en hommes-grenouilles afin d'accéder au tombeau inondé de Nastasen, roi de Koush ayant régné de 335 à 315 avant notre ère.

SUR LA ROUTE DE MÉROÉ

Ville étape au bord du Nil, Karima est une base idéale pour rayonner dans les alentours afin de découvrir tous ces sites remarquables plus beaux les uns que les autres. Nous la quittons pour rallier Méroé, dernière capitale du royaume de Koush, située à 360km de là. Au volant de nos 4X4, Moez et Walid doivent redoubler de prudence et faire preuve de la plus grande vigilance. La piste, qui n'est pourtant goudronnée que depuis une dizaine d'années, est par endroits détruite par le passage des «titanesques» camions surchargés de marchandises en provenance d'Égypte et destinées à alimenter les marchés de Khartoum.

Partie orientale du Sahara, le désert de Bayouda s'étend à perte de vue de chaque côté de la route. Situé dans une boucle du Nil, entre les 4e et 6e cataractes, il se caractérise par sa roche basaltique noire issue d'anciens volcans. Le paysage alterne entre pistes de galets et larges vallées traversées par des wadis aujourd'hui secs, où règne une maigre végétation. Il n'est pas rare d'y rencontrer des nomades bisharin, accompagnés de leurs troupeaux de chameaux, vivant dans des cabanes faites de branches de bois sec.

A mi-parcours, une pause s'impose et nous profitons d'être à Atbara pour nous restaurer. Deuxième plus grande ville du Soudan, bastion des premiers syndicats, Atbara est devenue au fil des ans le berceau de la révolution au Soudan, se rebellant tour à tour contre les trois dictateurs - Ibrahim Abboud, Gaafar Nimeiry et Omar el-Bechir - qui ont dirigé le pays depuis son indépendance en 1956.

A l'approche de Méroé, la tension monte en nous; notre rêve va enfin pouvoir se concrétiser. Nous allons pouvoir découvrir pour de vrai cette cité antique emblématique, centre d'une civilisation puissante et prospère, qui compte la plus grande concentration de pyramides au monde. D'un coup, au détour d'un virage, on l'aperçoit au loin, énigmatique et majestueuse, perchée sur son promontoire rocheux entouré de dunes de sable. L'heure avance, il ne faut pas perdre de temps. Une fois le bivouac installé à proximité, il serait dommage de ne pas pouvoir profiter du soleil couchant: le gris foncé de la pierre et le jaune orangé du sable mettent en relief la beauté de ce site tout à fait exceptionnel. Suite de l'aventure à vivre dans le prochain numéro de *newSpecial*. //

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Four-Thousand Miles Across Siberia

FROM ONE END OF RUSSIA TO THE OTHER IN 1893,
A LITTLE-KNOWN TRAVEL ACCOUNT

A chance meeting on the Geneva to Bristol flight led to an out-of-print travel book and the rediscovery of a journey I made in my youth. If you ever complain about the discomforts of long-distance economy travel, then the account of crossing Siberia in the late 19th century puts things in perspective.

In September last year I had the need to fly back to Bristol from Geneva and struck up one of those sky conversations with the gentleman in the seat next to me that are a product of shared space and time and the fact I'd finished my book and was in a chatty mood. Luckily, he was a friendly sort who didn't seem too bothered by my amiable curiosity.

He was a British patent clerk and long-term Swiss resident; we'd done the same bachelor's degree and had enough common touchpoints for a pleasant chit chat that passed the time.

Given that we were hurtling along at 800km/hour, the talk eventually turned to travelling, and I mentioned that in my distant youth, in 2001, I once travelled overland from Beijing to London primarily on the Trans-Siberian Express. One of those hastily arranged trips that the irrational confidence of youth faces without any concerns!

This opened a veritable gold mine of conversation which led to this article!

He told me that his great-grandfather had been a missionary in China in the late 19th century and made the same journey in 1893. Critically, whereas I had ridden in the relative comforts of the train, his ancestor had made the journey about a decade before that section of the Trans-Siberian railway was completed and had to go overland by quite different means. In fact, he is considered one of the last Europeans to have made the journey in the pre-railway era and, better yet, he had written an account of his travels.

We parted at Bristol airport arrivals, and I had the name of the book and its author with the warning that it is out of print and hard to find; Charles Wenyon and the delightfully titled *Four Thousand Miles Across Siberia on the Great Post-Road*.

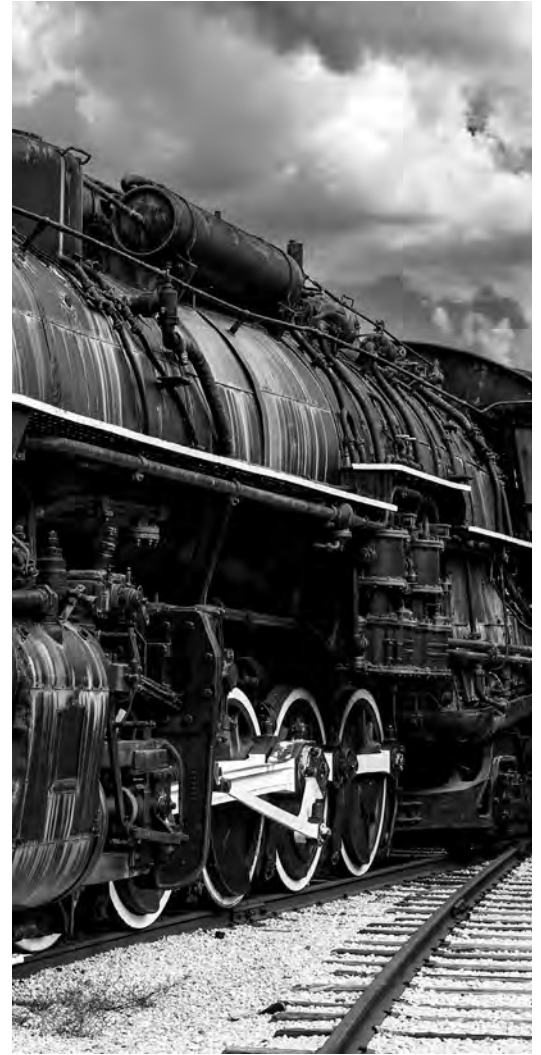
Details of Charles Wenyon's life are not easy to find. He was born on September 29, 1848, in Staffordshire, England and trained to be a Doctor and a Methodist pastor, ordained when he was 23 years old. He completed studies in Ireland and Edinburgh but in 1880 was sent to China as a medical missionary to found a hospital at Fatshan, near Canton, a facility that he would direct for seventeen years including the creation of a teaching faculty for Chinese medical students.

He had a wife and several children that accompanied him to the East in his missionary work. He spoke fluent Chinese, Russian and Mongolian by this point, as far as I can tell, with serviceable French and German. He was a member of the China branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

In 1893 he needed to travel back to England for reasons that I couldn't discover and packed his wife and children off in an ocean liner while he resolved to make the journey overland from eastern Siberia to London!

The internet eventually located a copy of the book, a facsimile reproduction of the 1903 version of the book, as it went through five editions (popular in its time), before fading into obscurity. If you search Charles Wenyon online today you get many more hits for his namesake, a famous protozoologist, that you get for the travelling missionary. Most of my research turned up Wenyon's name only as footnotes in other books about Siberia in the 19th century. Even his great grandson had admitted to me during the flight that book was mainly of interest only to academics today.

TEXT KEVIN CRAMPTON, WHO
PHOTOS BAYAR HAYDER-UNSPASH
& SHUTTERSTOCK



But the interest and value in the book (when my copy turned up) was indisputable since the slow pace of travel forced on Wenyon in 1893, meant he had ample time to meet and document the people and practices of these incredibly remote lands. Many groups have disappeared or now been assimilated into general Russian society, so the travelogue is a real snapshot in time of a lost world that the coming of the railway swept away.

His journey started in Vladivostok (the present-day eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian) which he reached by ocean ship, travelling with many of the Chinese labourers that were being imported to build the railway.

Without the benefits of rail, he had to rely on horse-drawn carriages called tarantass and river steamers that followed the intricate network of waterways of the deep interior as they pushed their way westwards. The titular Great Post-Road had been established to maintain communications throughout the great Russian Empire and every 20 miles there was a coach station in which fresh horses and tarantass were to be held in readiness for those travelling on official business.

If such business were slow then they could also be hired to travellers at a fixed rate, and this was Wenyon's only overland option, often travelling through the middle of the night.

From Vladivostok he travelled north to lake Khanka, arriving when it was still frozen over so that he had to wait upwards of a week for the thaw to let the river steamer arrive. He shared a log cabin with a Russian who bought an enormous fish at the start of the week and slowly ate bits of it for every meal, every day until it was gone, supplementing this diet with vodka and strong tea.

The river steamer, when it did make port was so overloaded that it towed an open-air barge behind it filled with economy passengers. The river craft were all powered by burning wood and so logging stations were available all along the navigable waterways to take on fuel, with the same spacing as the tarantass stables.

The Trans-Siberian railway
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to Vladivostok.

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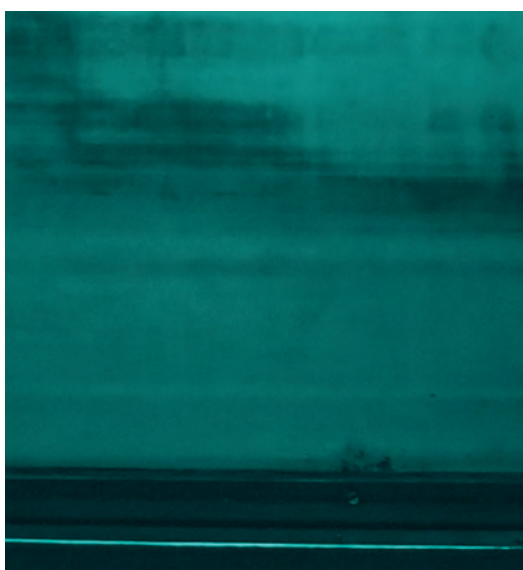
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Modern travel across Russia is efficient with the railway now running all the way to Vladivostok.



His march westwards was slow and halting, getting stuck in a thawing marsh, being swindled to pay for a fellow passenger, buying milk and eggs as a special luxury when he could find them as a relief from bricks of tea. There was an improbable picnic with a Russian Doctor and his English wife in Tchita, and meeting Siberians whose primary fabric was beaten fish skins. He met the Tungus people, the Buriats, Ostiaks and Orotchis. His steamer followed the Song'acha river to Khabarovsk, then the Amur, then the Usuri, steaming up every-narrowing channels deep into virgin forest.

The tarantass rides were uncomfortable, cold and often hilariously dangerous as the driver would get up speed down a hill to climb the next, ever mindful of bears or escaped convicts.

Wenyon crossed lake Baikal by steamer, his journey intersecting at this point with mine, but 108 years apart and reached Tomsk where he could transfer to the then railhead of the Russian network and ride in comfort all the way to the border with Germany. The last two chapters condense this huge distance with the speed of the train and Wenyon, the same as me, was disappointed that the railway crosses the great Ural Mountains at their least impressive point with a landscape not deserving the title "mountains" at all!

His final difficulty was in leaving Russia. His language skills had become so good that the border guards suspected that he was a convict escaped from Siberia and travelling on papers stolen from an Englishman with several days agonising delay as confirmation of his identity was sought from the consulate in St Petersburg. At one point he feared he was about to be sent back east permanently.

It's a superb travel account and a fascinating glimpse into a remote world that was about to change. We should finish with Wenyon's own memorable words about undertaking such a journey.

"If you are seasoned traveller, not depressed by solitude, tough as leather, patient as a mule, not at all fastidious about what you eat or drink, nor about the conditions of your skin and clothing, nor about where you sleep at night, - whether in bed, or on the floor, or in a jolting cart, - if you are such a traveller, you may cross Siberia as the Russians cross it, and quite as much enjoy the journey." //

Le col de la Bernina

COLS ROUTIERS DE SUISSE (11)

Le col de la Bernina mérite bien d'être un des cols les plus populaires de la Suisse: la magnifique route offre des serpentines larges et généreuses, suivant le fameux chemin de fer qui relie St. Moritz à Tirano en Italie, un des plus beaux voyages en train qu'on puisse s'imaginer avec vue sur le monde des glaciers de la Bernina.

Le col de la Bernina se trouve aux Grisons à une altitude de 2328 mètres d'altitude et est le plus haut col de Suisse ouvert toute l'année. Il relie l'Engadine au Val Poschiavo et forme la frontière entre deux régions linguistiques, l'Engadine où on parle romanche et allemand, et le val Poschiavo, où on parle l'italien. Il est bien sûr aussi une ligne de partage des eaux: vers le nord, l'eau termine dans la mer noire, et côté sud, dans l'adriatique.

Nous prenons la route du col un beau jour de septembre depuis Pontresina. Déjà, en quittant Pontresina, la vue sur les majestueux sommets où règne le Piz Bernina nous enchante: les glaciers scintillent au soleil et l'eau froide de l'Ova da Bernina danse en se précipitant vers la rivière Inn. Nous répétons le trajet, mais en train, un jour hivernal et neigeux: des impressionnantes cascades de glace se sont formées là où l'eau sautait en été, juste à côté de la route.

Jusqu'au col, la route est étonnamment droite, elle monte doucement sans virages importants. En grande partie, nous longeons le chemin de fer, et parfois nous le croisons. Après un peu plus de huit kilomètres, nous passons Bernina Suot, à 2046 mètres d'altitude. Au 16^e siècle, des maisons ont été construites ici pour héberger les gens qui venaient explorer les mines d'argent dans le Val Minor. Une auberge y accueille toujours des voyageurs.

Un peu plus loin, nous voyons les stations des télécabines du domaine de ski Diavolezza/Lagalb, 45 kilomètres de pistes au-delà de 2000 mètres d'altitude. Devant l'hôtel de montagne de Diavolezza à 2978 mètres d'altitude commence la plus longue descente sur glacier de Suisse, huit kilomètres de piste marqués mais pas préparés, pour un dénivelé de 1000 mètres. La descente se termine devant l'auberge de Morteratsch, où se trouve aussi la gare de chemin de fer de la

Bernina, qui peut vous ramener à la gare de la télécabine, très pratique!

Nous continuons encore la route sur quelques kilomètres dans un paysage de plus en plus austère, et nous voilà déjà au col! Depuis la construction d'une route carrossable entre 1842 et 1865, le col de la Bernina forme un des plus importants passages nord-sud des Alpes. Cependant, dans l'histoire, ce col n'a pas joué un grand rôle. Au 15^e siècle, les communes de l'Engadine et du val Poschiavo s'engagèrent à entretenir le chemin jusqu'au début de la Valteline, en Italie. Après la conquête de la Valteline par les Grisons en 1512, le passage de la Bernina prit de l'importance. Au milieu du 16^e siècle, la France ouvrit un service postal vers Venise par le col, qui constituait à l'époque le chemin le plus court vers Venise. A la fin du 16^e siècle l'importance du col déclinait de nouveau, avec l'ouverture d'une route plus courte vers Venise en prolongation du col de Splügen. Le commerce local de châtaignes, chanvre, lin, soie, fromage et vin continuait de se faire en passant le col et était taxé par les autorités de Pontresina et Poschiavo qui entretenaient le passage.

Il y avait deux variantes pour approcher le col de la Bernina depuis le côté sud, une qui passait par Pisciadel, et une autre qui passait par Corviglia. La route passant par Corviglia perdit en popularité après des incidents d'avalanche à la fin du 18^e siècle. La route actuelle suit la variante est par Pisciadel, tant que le chemin de fer de la Bernina passe par la variante ouest de Corviglia, et se sépare donc de la route entre le col et Poschiavo. Si les conditions le permettaient, les marchands parcouraient les 34 kilomètres entre Pontresina et Poschiavo en une seule journée. En cas de nécessité, l'hospice au col pouvait héberger les muletiers.

A partir de 1865, l'arrivée des diligences ouvrait la route aux voyageurs et touristes. Mais avec l'inauguration du chemin de fer en 1910, cette époque touchait à sa fin, étant donné que le train était beaucoup plus confortable que les calèches. Le train assurait un service par tout temps, y compris par temps de neige, et par conséquent, la route restait fermée en hiver. C'est seulement en 1965, avec l'augmentation du tourisme d'hiver, qu'il fut décidé de garder la route ouverte en toute saison.



Le chemin de fer de la Bernina est inscrit au patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO depuis juillet 2008. Chef-d'œuvre d'ingénierie, le tracé extraordinaire entre St. Moritz et Tirano mesure 61 kilomètres et comprend 13 tunnels et galeries ainsi que 52 viaducs et ponts. La ligne est l'une de plus pentues au monde pour un chemin de fer sans système de crémaillère, avec des pentes jusqu'à 7%. Le spectaculaire viaduc en spirale de Brusio, entre Poschiavo et Tirano, attire des amateurs de trains du monde entier. La ligne est intégrée harmonieusement dans le paysage alpin, et la plus haute gare de la ligne, un peu au-dessous de l'hospice à 2253 mètres d'altitude, est située au bord du Lago Bianco. Même les touristes venus en voiture s'y arrêtent pour pouvoir prendre une photo avec le train rouge! Depuis l'arrêt de l'hospice, le train entame sa descente vers Poschiavo, mais s'arrête encore à Alp Grüm, à 2091 mètres d'altitude, accessible uniquement en train ou à pied. Par beau temps une belle vue s'ouvre vers le sud et le lac de Poschiavo tandis que, derrière le bâtiment de l'auberge, la vue sur les glaciers impressionne les voyageurs. Le voyage dans le Bernina Express est une expérience impressionnante, été comme hiver, et offre par beau temps des vues spectaculaires sur les sommets et leurs glaciers comme le Piz Roseg (3937 mètres), le Piz Morteratsch (3751 mètres), le Piz Bernina (4049 mètres) et

le Piz Palù (3901 mètres). Même pendant une tempête de neige, le trajet vaut la peine. On se sent comme en Sibérie et, au lieu d'admirer la vue depuis la gare d'Alp Grüm, on se réjouit de prendre un chocolat chaud à l'intérieur et d'admirer les locomotives équipées de chasse-neige des chemins de fer rhétiques.

Trois lacs se trouvent à proximité du col: le petit lac de la Cruseta, qui est sur le col et forme la frontière entre Pontresina et Poschiavo, le Lej Nair et le Lago Bianco. Le grand Lago Bianco, qui fait 3 kilomètres de long et 800 mètres de large, porte son nom à cause des eaux de fonte des glaciers qui l'alimentent et qui sont riches en limon, d'où leur appellation de «lait des glaciers». Depuis 1910, le lac est utilisé comme barrage. Le plus petit Lej Nair au contraire est alimenté par des ruisseaux, et son eau est donc transparente, avec des reflets bleus et noirs. Comme ils se trouvent côte-à-côte, les deux lacs forment un joli contraste!

Sur le col se trouve l'hospice Bernina, un endroit populaire pour contempler le magnifique paysage de haute montagne, tremper les pieds dans l'eau du lac de la Cruseta (en été seulement!), et voir le mythique train rouge de la Bernina passer en contrebas de la route longeant le Lago Bianco. Mention est faite d'un

Des beaux virages descendant vers Poschiavo.

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Bernina



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Le jardin
des glaciers



hospice au col dès 1519, mais l'actuel hospice a été construit en 1865, date de l'ouverture de la route carrossable.

Sur le col se trouve aussi la base d'entretien hivernal de la route de la Bernina. À l'intérieur se cache une camera obscura, qui montre le paysage autour avec des sommets de montagne, mais bien sûr sens dessus dessous, une expérience inédite! La camera obscura se visite uniquement en été et en visite guidée.

Quand nous nous arrêtons en septembre pour voir la ligne de partage d'eaux, des œuvres d'art attirent notre attention: d'anciennes cartes géographiques avec des lignes imaginaires colorées. Ces œuvres d'art faisaient partie d'une triennale d'art contemporain dans la région de la Bernina. Plusieurs sentiers pédestres partent depuis le col; l'un d'eux permet de rejoindre le jardin des glaciers de Cavaglia, une belle randonnée de 2 heures et demie. On peut aussi prendre le train jusqu'à la gare de Cavaglia, pour avoir plus de temps pour la visite. Le jardin contient notamment de nombreuses marmites glaciaires et une flore alpine très variée.

Après le col, la route devient plus raide et forme des beaux virages. Après trois bons kilomètres, nous laissons de côté un poste de douane à gauche de la route - depuis là, une autre route descend vers Livigno en Italie. Quelques virages plus loin se trouve l'ancien relais La Rôsa, construit au 17^e siècle surtout comme étape pour les muletiers. C'est un endroit enchanteur, à côté du ruisseau le Poschiavino, qui invite à faire une pause et se laisser bercer par l'air doux du sud qui monte depuis la vallée. La route passe maintenant dans la forêt, sur les parkings il y a des panneaux recommandant de ne pas laisser des déchets - il se peut qu'il y ait des ours dans les alentours!

Nous continuons à descendre, et voilà que le Val Poschiavo s'ouvre à nos yeux. La route contourne le très joli bourg pour continuer vers le lac de Poschiavo et Tirano à la frontière italienne. Mais nous nous arrêtons là pour découvrir le village où nous nous sentons déjà en Italie. Au 18^e siècle, des habitants de Poschiavo émigraient vers l'Espagne pour y travailler dans la confiserie, une spécialité de la région. Ceux qui réussissaient, revenaient dans leur village pour y construire des grandes maisons de style néoclassique, et le «quartier des espagnols» est encore une attraction aujourd'hui.

Par ailleurs, pour celles et ceux qui pensent en entendant le nom Bernina d'abord aux machines

à coudre, sachez que ces machines d'une entreprise familiale suisse ne sont pas produites dans la région, mais que leur fabrication se fait en Thurgovie! Apparemment, le fondateur était si impressionné par la vue du Piz Bernina qu'il a donné le nom de ce sommet à sa ligne de machines à coudre; suivant la tradition familiale, l'actuelle propriétaire (5^e génération!) a récemment fait l'ascension du Piz Bernina, comme sa mère et grand-mère l'avaient fait avant elle. //

(De haut en bas)
Vue sur l'hospice et le lac de la Cruseta.
Le train de la Bernina longe
le lac à l'auteur du col.



Menton

90^E FÊTE DU CITRON

TEXT & PHOTOS
CLAUDE MAILLARD

Au début du siècle passé, Menton crée l'événement dans la pure tradition des festivals. Dès les années trente, la ville joue l'originalité : les agrumes entrent en scène. Depuis, la Fête du Citron à Menton¹ ravit des milliers de spectateurs venus des quatre coins du monde pour admirer les motifs géants tout en agrumes.

En 1895, des hôteliers proposent à la municipalité d'organiser un défilé pour animer la ville en hiver. Dès l'année suivante, la parade de Menton séduit les habitants comme les riches hivernants. A l'époque, il est de bon ton de venir passer les mois d'hiver sous le climat clément de la Côte d'Azur. Rois, reines - dont la Reine Victoria -, princes et artistes fréquentent les palaces mentonnais ou se font construire de splendides villas.

En 1929, Menton est encore le premier producteur de citron du continent. Un hôtelier a l'idée de créer une exposition de fleurs et d'agrumes dans les jardins de l'Hôtel Riviera. Le succès est tel que rapidement la fête va descendre dans la rue avec des chariots d'arbustes plantés d'oranges et de citrons qui évoluent avec de charmantes Mentonnaises. La municipalité, désireuse de développer le tourisme, cherche à donner au défilé une couleur typiquement locale. Et c'est ainsi que naît la Fête du Citron en 1934, une réussite qui se confirmera d'année en année. Reconnue par le Ministère de la Culture, elle est inscrite à l'inventaire du patrimoine culturel immatériel en France depuis 2019. Aujourd'hui, pour répondre aux besoins de la fête, ce ne sont pas moins de 300 professionnels qui sont mobilisés pour son organisation. 180 tonnes d'agrumes acheminées du monde entier sont nécessaires pour la décoration, agrumes qui sont ensuite revendus aux Mentonnais et aux vacanciers à l'issue des festivités.

QUAND CITRON RIME AVEC MENTON

La Fête du Citron à Menton nous avait donné rendez-vous du 17 février au 3 mars derniers pour sa 90^e édition. Durant cet événement phare sur la Côte d'Azur, les citrons ont été à l'honneur avec un majestueux programme d'animations regroupant corsos, feux d'artifice, exposi-



tions et spectacles. Tous les ans, pour la Fête du Citron, près de 250 000 personnes se rendent dans la charmante et pittoresque ville de Menton située aux confins de l'Italie, de la Principauté de Monaco et du Comté de Nice.

La Fête du Citron propose à chacune de ses éditions un thème spécifique. A quelques mois des Jeux Olympiques de Paris 2024, elle ne pouvait pas coller au plus près du cœur de l'actualité avec un choix qui s'est porté sur les JO de l'antiquité à nos jours.

Organisés de jour comme de nuit, les fameux corsos - défilés de chars habillés d'agrumes - marquent les temps forts de la Fête du Citron. Les corsos nocturnes, fascinants et colorés, sont l'occasion rêvée de vivre des moments féériques et inoubliables en famille ou entre amis, sous les étoiles et les lumières éclatantes du défilé. Ils rassemblent chaque année des milliers de visiteurs venus admirer la créativité des artisans locaux et le travail minutieux réalisé sur les chars. Quant aux corsos des Fruits d'Or, ils sont organisés la journée sur la Promenade du Soleil, avenue longeant la mer Méditerranée sur environ 2 km, du Quartier de la Madone jusqu'à

Le citron de Menton,
à la table des Grands Chefs.

la Vieille-Ville. Le développement du tourisme balnéaire huppé, russe et anglo-saxon, laissa de belles empreintes dans la ville, encore visibles aujourd'hui et notamment sur la Promenade du Soleil. Là se succèdent les façades monumentales des palaces d'antan joliment agrémentés de yuccas, d'euphorbes et de palmiers divers. Le corso des Fruits d'Or est une véritable institution à Menton. Symbole de la beauté et de l'éclat des agrumes de la région, il offre un moment de partage et de plaisir pour les petits comme pour les grands venus admirer un cortège haut en couleur. Avec ses chars admirablement décorés, ses fanfares et ses groupes de danseurs venus des quatre coins du monde, on se laisse vite emporter par les rythmes enjoués et la convivialité qui règnent lors de ces défilés sur les bords de la Méditerranée.

SAVEURS ET SENTEURS ENSOLEILLÉES

L'exposition des motifs d'agrumes, l'un des temps forts incontournables de la Fête du Citron à Menton, se tenait comme chaque année aux Jardins Biovès, belle promenade de 800 mètres qui arbore, tout au long de l'année, pelouses fleuries, essences exotiques, sculptures et fontaines. Situés au cœur de la ville, en face de l'Office de Tourisme, ces jardins portent le nom d'Emile Biovès, maire de Menton à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Ils ont été aménagés sur l'esplanade qui recouvre le Careï, petit fleuve côtier du département des Alpes-Maritimes qui prend sa source à 1100m d'altitude et dont l'embouchure se situe devant le Casino Barrière de Menton. Durant deux semaines, les Jardins Biovès se transforment en un véritable musée à ciel ouvert, mettant en lumière tout le savoir-faire, la passion et l'incroyable créativité des artistes locaux. L'exposition, originale et unique en son genre avec ses véritables chefs-d'œuvre réalisés avec des agrumes, est une attraction immanquable pour les amoureux d'art, de nature et de traditions provençales. De forts moments magiques qui resteront pour toujours inoubliables.

D'innombrables activités étaient également proposées au public qui n'avait que l'embarras du choix. Pour les amoureux de la nature, des randonnées dans des jardins extraordinaires permettaient notamment de découvrir la culture, la cueillette, l'histoire et les particularités du citron de Menton. Le patrimoine local était aussi à l'honneur avec des visites de la ville et de domaines d'exception dominant la Riviera. Ateliers de peinture et de céramique, spectacles, concerts... Il y en avait pour tout le monde.

Pour mettre un peu de soleil sur notre table avec la citronnade, le limoncello, le vin d'orange, la limonade, le miel, les confitures ou encore l'huile d'olive au citron de Menton, le Salon de l'Artisanat organisé au Palais de l'Europe, en parallèle de la Fête du Citron, nous a offert de belles rencontres avec le talent des artisans régionaux. Des couleurs éclatantes des faïences mentonnaises aux saveurs et senteurs ensoleillées des agrumes et des olives, c'est tout un savoir-faire porté par une identité ancestrale et tourné vers l'avenir qui suscitera notre curiosité.

Le Palais de l'Europe accueillait également le Festival des orchidées présenté par l'Association des Orchidophiles et Epiphytophiles de France. Rivalisant de couleurs et de formes, la fleur au parfum suave et mystérieux caresse notre regard et nous fascine par son élégance et sa beauté. Véritable invitation au voyage, ce festival ouvrait une parenthèse apaisante loin du charivari de la Fête.

RECONNU AU PLUS HAUT NIVEAU

Cultivé depuis le XVI^e siècle, le citron de Menton² porte en lui la passion des femmes et des hommes qui l'ont mené à l'excellence. Son goût, ses arômes concentrent la beauté des paysages du bassin mentonnais, la douceur de son climat et l'héritage d'un terroir. Cet agrume est pour Menton un élément incontournable de son histoire et de son patrimoine. Plusieurs variétés de citron sont cultivées sur le mentonnais : Santa Theresa, Villafranca, Euréka... Sa forme est elliptique plutôt que ronde, sa couleur jaune vif, il est riche en acides et en essences et sa peau a une forte teneur en huile essentielle. Le célèbre fruit d'or emblème de Menton a obtenu sa reconnaissance au plus haut niveau et bénéficie depuis 2015 d'une Indication géographique protégée attribuée par l'Union européenne, résultat d'un long travail qui ouvre de belles perspectives économiques.

Le monde de la gastronomie et de l'épicerie fine ne tarit pas d'éloges sur les atouts du citron de Menton. Référence gastronomique des Grands Chefs, ils sont nombreux à l'utiliser en cuisine : Ducasse, Robuchon, Bocuse, Garrault... et Mauro Colagreco. Après avoir eu un coup de cœur pour Menton, le chef italo-argentin a ouvert en 2006 son restaurant « Le Mirazur³ » sur les hauteurs de la ville. En 2019, il est élu Meilleur Chef au monde et son établissement - auréolé de trois étoiles au Guide Michelin - s'est vu décerner le titre de meilleur restaurant de la Planète.

MENTON, LA «PERLE DE LA RIVIERA»

Ville préservée, Menton bénéficie d'un microclimat subtropical bienfaiteur qui lui fait presque ignorer l'hiver. Découvrir la «Perle de la Riviera» au fil de ses petites ruelles bordées de maisons aux façades colorées, c'est se laisser séduire par la sérénité et le charme d'un lieu à nul autre pareil.

«Ma ville est un jardin», telle est la philosophie et la vision de la municipalité depuis plusieurs décennies. Un héritage botanique et végétal particulièrement riche et unique au monde - dont témoignent ses sept jardins d'exception - font la fierté de Menton et lui ont valu de figurer dans le cercle fermé des villes fleuries ayant reçu la prestigieuse «Fleur d'or».

«Artium civitas» (Cité des Arts), la devise inscrite à l'entrée de l'Hôtel de Ville, traduit la vocation culturelle de Menton qui s'exprime dans la valorisation de son patrimoine architectural, remarquable et sauvegardé - qui mêle héritage gallo-romain, méditerranéen et de la Renaissance - confirmée par l'attribution du label «Ville d'Art et d'Histoire» en 1991.

A Menton, le long de son littoral, partout la montagne semble se jeter dans la mer; des panoramas à couper le souffle, des lieux authentiques, une nature généreuse et protégée. Entre la «Perle de la Riviera» et ses villages perchés, l'Histoire se conjugue à tous les temps. Douceur de vivre, beauté sauvage des paysages, patrimoine historique; ajoutez à cela un parfum d'Italie: tous les atouts d'une destination sur un même territoire. Être à Menton, c'est se sentir ailleurs, comme dans un écrin. Ici on ressent la dolce vita et on s'émerveille à chaque instant. Vous êtes au paradis! //

- 1 Office de Tourisme Menton, Riviera & Merveilles
www.menton-riviera-merveilles.fr
- 2 Association pour la promotion du citron de Menton
www.lecitrondementon.org
- 3 Restaurant «Le Mirazur»
www.mirazur.fr



(De haut en bas)
La «Perle de la Riviera».
Flamme de la Fraternité.
Skate Sensations.



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Réf. 39460



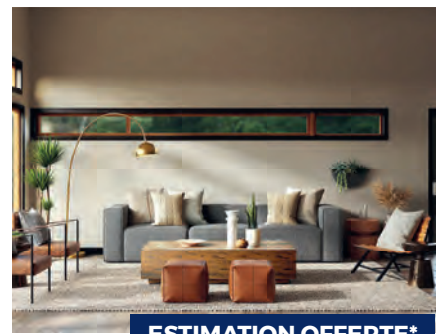
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