

TUS ATHLONE GREEN-CAMPUS COMMITTEE

GREEN WEEK 2024
4TH - 8TH MARCH



*GAN DRAMHAÍL IN
ÉIRINN
NULINĖS ATLIEKOS
AIRIJOJE*

Climate in the Community

OR

Communities in the hurricane of climate change

Jack O'Sullivan

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland

The Present Situation

- ❑ Rising carbon dioxide levels
- ❑ Global soil loss and biodiversity loss
- ❑ Accelerated rate of extinction of many species
- ❑ Climate chaos, atmospheric warming
- ❑ Earth's systems under pressure
- ❑ Adverse impacts on human health

The Present Situation

- ❑ Loss of glaciers and ice sheets in Arctic and Antarctic
- ❑ Glaciers melting will have a dramatic effects on glacier-fed rivers, agriculture and food supplies
- ❑ Sea-level rise, gradually accelerating

The Present Situation

- ❑ Acidification of ocean surface affecting planktonic organisms
- ❑ Melting of permafrost is releasing huge amounts of methane, a powerful global warming gas
- ❑ Other feedback loops becoming close to causing irreversible system change

The Present Situation – looking deeper

- 2023 has been the hottest year on record: Each month from June to November has broken previous ceilings.
- It has been a year of escalating polarization and conflicts: Europe (Ukraine/Russia), the Middle East (Israel/Gaza), Africa (the Sahel region, Somalia, Ethiopia), and Asia (Armenia/Azerbaijan, Korean Peninsula, South China Sea).
- It has been the year of AI: The arrival of generative AI is reshaping human experience and societal structures in ways that were unimaginable a few years ago.

How did we arrive at this situation ?

- ❑ We are now in the **Anthropocene** !
- ❖ Foolishness, stupidity, arrogance, competition for resources, lack of cohesion, lack of cooperation
- ❖ We collectively create consequences that nobody wants or desires

How did we arrive at this situation ?

- ❖ We are deepening the ecological divide: climate destabilisation, biodiversity loss, mass extinction;
- ❖ We are deepening the social divide: polarisation, inequality, war; and,
- ❖ We are deepening the spiritual divide: hopelessness, anxiety, depression and trauma (read Gabor Maté and Otto Scharmer).

How did we arrive at this situation ?

- ❖ We have lost our connection with the land (read Manchán Magan);
- ❖ We have lost our connection with our language (again read Manchán Magan); and,
- ❖ We are being traumatised by many factors, including a huge avalanche of deliberate disinformation.

These multiple divides, disconnections and losses are like an an abyss in front of our collective eyes.

Why did we arrive at this situation ?

What influenced us; who or what are the actors on the world's stage ?

- **Governments' inactivity;**
- **Large multinational companies and lobbyists; and,**
- **Individual people who do not believe that climate change is taking place and is caused by human activities.**

How can we extract ourselves from this situation ?

How can we extract ourselves from this climate chaos spiral – like we are being sucked down into a vortex with no end! Down the plug-hole !



Like this?



Or like this?

What can Communities and Individuals do?

Let's begin with an element of the **Zero Waste Alliance Ireland** policy, formulated in 2003, and then apply it to the climate chaos problem:

1. The goal of environmentally sustainable development requires, as a basic principle, that human communities must behave like natural ones, living comfortably within the natural flow of energy from the sun and plants, producing no wastes which cannot be recycled back into the earth's systems, and guided by new economic values which are in harmony with personal and ecological values. In nature, the waste products of every living organism serve as raw materials to be transformed by other living creatures, or benefit the planet in other ways. Our policies and our practices need to mirror this ecological reality.
2. Communities cannot resolve the waste problem alone and should not be forced to clean up after irresponsible industries have landed us in a mess !

What can Communities and Individuals do?

Addressing the problems of climate change and climate chaos requires that human communities must behave like natural ones, living comfortably within the natural flow of energy from the sun and plants ...

Recycling and using the green bin will not stop climate chaos!

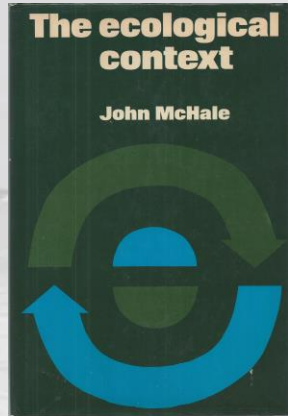
We need to recognise and show that it is a deliberate policy of multinationals and governments to place responsibility on individuals so as to avoid shining the light on their own irresponsible behaviour ... greenwashing !

What can Communities and Individuals do to prevent further climate chaos?

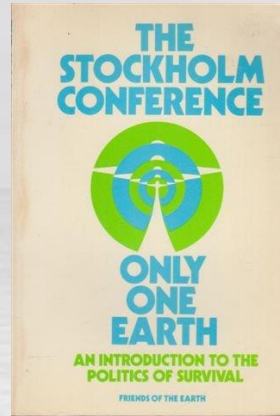
Answering this question will require:

- ✓ Recognising that our simplistic understanding of the world in which we live is no longer fit for purpose;
- ✓ Addressing the **power dynamics** in the current world order;
- ✓ Asking hard questions about development and prosperity;
- ✓ Critically evaluating the **structure of economic models** in the globalised economy;
- ✓ Examining the nature and the roles of the **global institutions** that dominate and perpetuate the status quo; and,
- ✓ Examining the intrinsic nature of **political systems**.

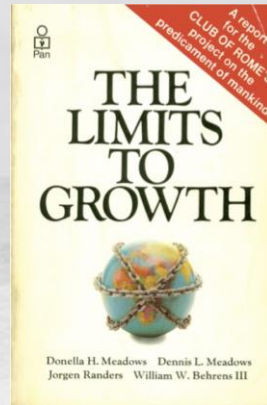
Emergence of Understanding:



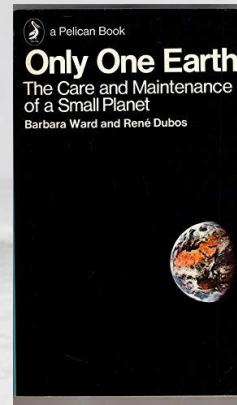
1971



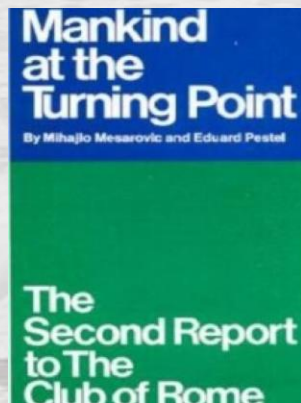
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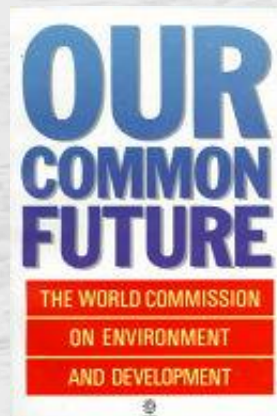
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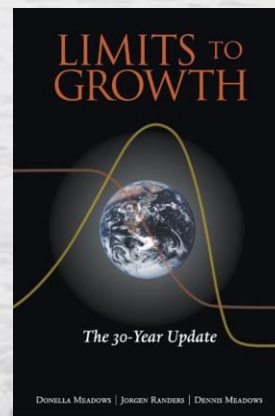
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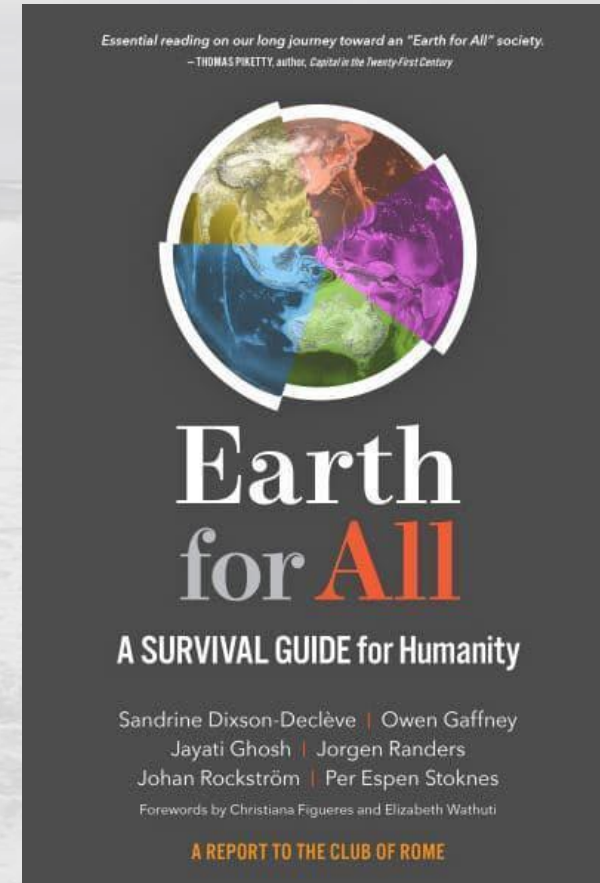
1975



1987



2004



2022

A quick overview of some history will help us answer this question:

1922, Ireland's independence a year old; World population **1.96** billion

1942, the year I was born; World population **2.35** billion

1952, the year my wife was born; World population **2.5** billion

1972, "Limits to Growth" published; World population **3.84** billion

1992, "Beyond the Limits" published; World population **5.5** billion

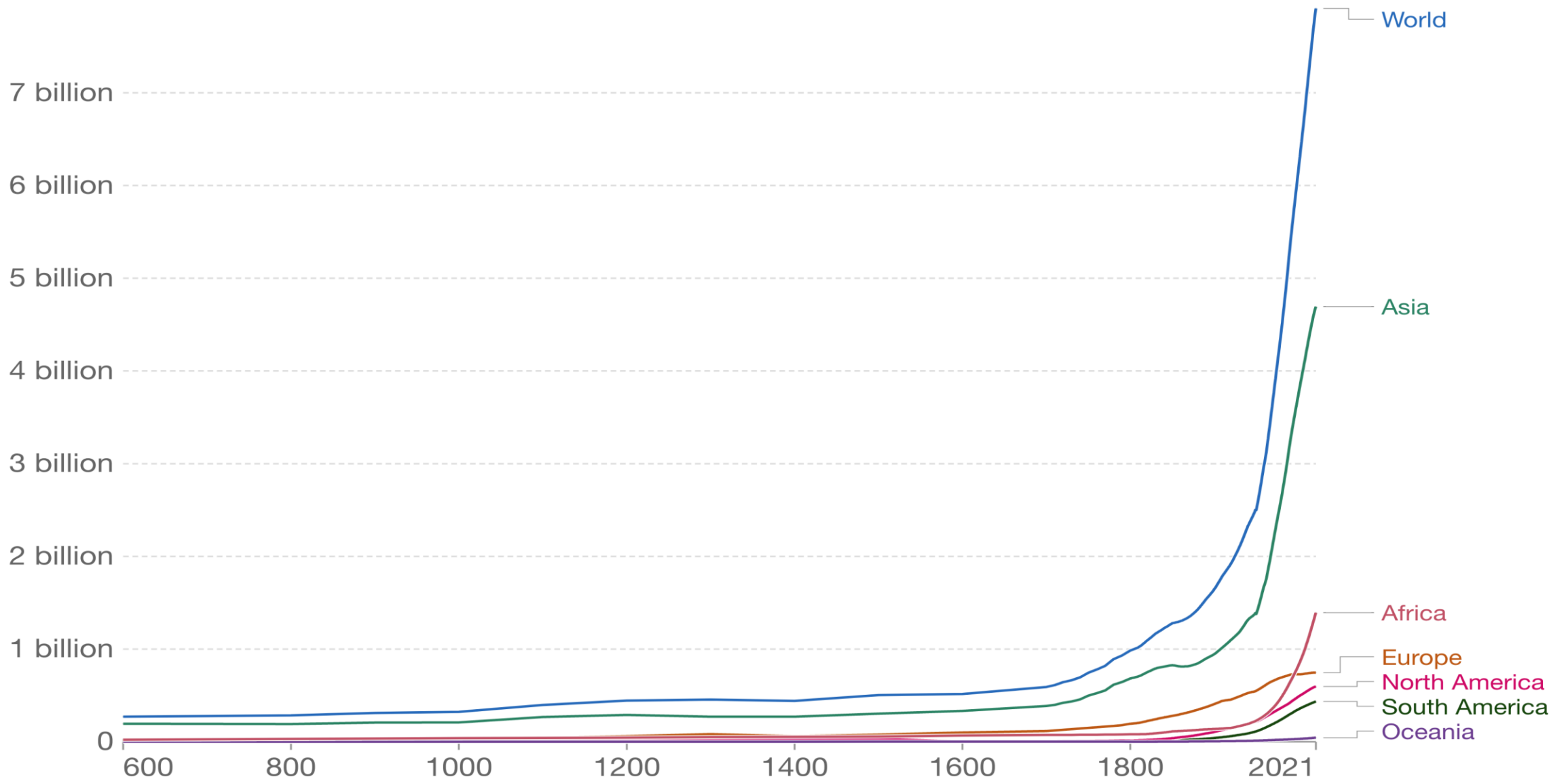
2002, World population **6.3** billion

2022, "Earth for All" published: World population **7.95 - 8.0** billion.

With population growth comes greater agricultural production, more manufacturing, more consumption, more resource shortages, more waste, more greenhouse gases, less land for wildlife, more soil loss, increasing climate chaos, etc.

Population, 600 to 2021

Climate in the Community



Warning signs:

*“Organic life has been evolving on the planet for billions of years – the human species for about a tiny fragment of that time. It is only in the most recent and a brief period of his tenure that **man has developed in sufficient numbers and acquired enough power to become one of the most potentially dangerous organisms that the planet has ever hosted**”.*

John McHale, “The Ecological Context” 1971

“The present decade has been marked by a retreat from social concerns. We must remember that the environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs; and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word ‘environment’ a connotation of naiveté in political circles”.
“It is futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality”.

— Our Common Future. The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

Updating the 1972 Limits to Growth Model

*In 1992, the authors of “The Limits to Growth” published a 20-year update to the original publication titled “Beyond the Limits”, in which they conclude that two decades of history mainly supported the conclusions advanced in the original publication – humanity is following the “**Business as Usual**” trajectory. Plus one major new finding: that humanity has **already overshoot the limits of the Earth’s support capacity**.*

— Beyond the Limits, 1992

*The 1992 Club of Rome study was ground-breaking in another direction – it prioritised sustainability, and advocated “**Visioning**”, “**Networking**” “**Truth-telling**”, “**Learning**” and “**Loving**” as guiding principles for action. The model established that lack of technology was not a barrier to sustainability.*

*The 30-year update, published in 2004, utilised terms such as “**ecological footprint**” and “**carrying capacity of the Earth**”, and emphasised that making the transition to sustainability would have to be the next great revolution.*

— Limits to Growth – The 30-year Update, 2004

“Earth for All – A Survival Guide for Humanity” (Club of Rome 2022)

What have we learned during the last 53 years ?

- *Our simplistic understanding of the world in which we live is no longer fit for purpose;*
- *We need to critically address and bring about major changes in the power dynamics which affect the current world order; especially the nature and roles of the global institutions that dominate and perpetuate the status quo;*
- *We need to critically evaluate the structure and damaging effects of the current economic models;*
- *We need to eliminate poverty and inequality; and,*
- *We need to examine the nature of our political systems.*

Some lessons from the current and previous world models, summarised in “Earth for All”:

*Climate chaos, environmental degradation and perverse inequality have been defined and described as **separate multiple crises**, often in competition with each other; but in fact they are different aspects of what we might understand as the **metacrisis**. These crises are interconnected not only in their social and economic realities, but more fundamentally in their source and they share the same deep root: **extractivism based on extrinsic principles** (externalities).*

*There are **deep-rooted structural inequities** in the way the global economy works and unravelling them will be met with resistance.*

It is impossible to reconcile free-market ideology with sustainability and resource management issues.

Letting common resources be exploited by an unregulated free market prevents these finite resources from contributing to long-term economic development and wellbeing for all.

Avoiding massive climate chaos and making the transition to sustainability will require a new political philosophy for human progress which will place collective welfare over individual rights, abandon unimpeded consumption and reinterpret the definition of prosperity in an era of constraints. Although the lessons need to be applied differently in each continent and every country, there are three basic or foundational objectives:

- 1. Protecting common and public goods;**
- 2. Defining a path towards moderate prosperity; and,**
- 3. Helping societies to prosper within challenging resource constraints.**

What can we do as communities and individuals?

- ✓ The challenges we face require us to look into the mirror of the whole system.
- ✓ In that mirror we see *ourselves* and our potential to shift the inner place of operating by ...
- ✓ . . . **opening our minds** to shift our thinking from a **silos** to a **systems view**,
- ✓ . . . **opening our hearts** to shift our relationships with each other and with the planet from **toxic** to **transformative**,
- ✓ . . . opening our wills to shift our actions from **ego** to **eco**.
- ✓ **Small islands of coherence**, small groups, even individuals, have the capacity to lift and change an entire system (Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion).

What can we do as communities and individuals?

In many places around the world, in moments of crisis, systemic breakdown, and existential need, people are helping each other.

Volunteer work is often the secret ingredient to help create resilience after seeing the damage being caused by climate change, and the resulting hardship and loss suffered by people and communities.

Traditional entities — companies, NGOs, governments and nation-states — are learning to collaborate in new ways across boundaries.

It's nothing short of amazing what we as humans can do if we choose to operate from an eco-perspective rather than an ego-perspective.

What can we do as communities and individuals?

Small islands of coherence have the capacity to lift an entire system.

“When a system is far from equilibrium,” says Nobel Prize-winning chemist **Ilya Prigogine**, “*small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to lift the entire system to a higher order.*” That our system is far from equilibrium became abundantly clear during the present decade – forest fires, climate chaos, warfare directed at civilian populations, massive inequality still pervasive, womens’ rights not recognised fully and globally, etc.

What can we do as communities and individuals?

Small islands of coherence ...

Otto Scharmer asks:

“Where is the smallest unit of an *island of coherence*? It’s in our heart. It’s in our relationships. It’s in our circles of deep listening and generative conversation. It’s in our efforts to transform difficult relationships in our work and in our lives through generative deep listening and conversations.”



And finally, engage in work that reconnects people to each other, and people to nature.

This work is also known as Deep Ecology Work (as in Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan), Active Hope (as in Japan) and Despair and Empowerment Work (as it was known in its first years). The green bin can then become a powerful instrument of change !

Joanna Macy

Thank you for listening, and I hope I have encouraged you to think radically, constructively and hopefully that the worst effects of climate change can be mitigated by community and individual work, and we can also learn to adapt to life on a planet where the climate and global ecosystems have become transformed as a result of human activities.

If you would like to discuss further, contact me at jackosullivan2006@gmail.com or 086 381 9811.

**Or become a member of Zero Waste Alliance Ireland
(<https://www.zwai.ie/get-involved>) admin@zwai.ie**

