



Revisiting *The Earth Charter* and Our Ethical Obligations to Planetary Health

Colin L. Soskolne, PhD (Epidemiology)

Professor emeritus, University of Alberta, Edmonton, CANADA

Adjunct Professor, Health Research Institute, University of Canberra, AUSTRALIA

- URL: www.colinsoskolne.com (*archive of PPT presentations*)

Health Earth: Planetary Health Affects Everyone's Health (S03.01C)

Joint Annual Meeting of the ***International Society of Exposure Science*** and the ***International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISES-ISEE 2018)***: Addressing Complex Local and Global Issues in Environmental Exposure and Health

August 26-30, 2018
Ottawa, Canada



Acknowledgement

**Mirian Vilela, Executive Director,
Earth Charter International holds a
faculty position in the *University
for Peace*, Costa Rica.**

**She provided reference to several
examples used in this presentation**



Framework for this presentation

- The human enterprise needs to shift from its current unsustainable trajectory to a path of sustainability; how epidemiology can help in such movement
- The relevance of values and ethical principles
- **The Earth Charter (2000)**
- Examples from books, and of governance in Mexico and Brazil, and from universities in Spain, Greece, and the USA: all demonstrate its utility, certainly as an educational instrument



Can *epidemiology* remain relevant in the face of *global ecological change*?

“We seem to have been living for a long time on the assumption that we can safely deal with the parts, leaving the whole to take care of itself. But now the news from everywhere is that we have to begin gathering up the scattered pieces, figuring out where they belong, and putting them back together. For the parts can be reconciled to each other only within the pattern of the whole to which they belong.”

- Wendell Berry (b. 1934)



Reductionist vs. Systems Approaches

- **Reductionism:** Pursuit of single causes along linear paths to explain a phenomenon

- or -

- **Systems Approaches/Wholism:** Integrative, multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to explaining a phenomenon; embraces complexity



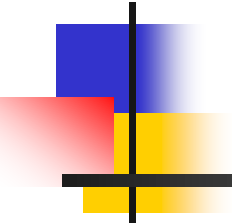
Transdisciplinarity

- ***Transdisciplinary approaches to Human Health are approaches that integrate the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, and in so doing transcend each of their traditional boundaries. Emergent concepts and methods are the hallmark of the transdisciplinary effort***



Anthropocentrism vs. eco/biocentrism

- **To reconnect humans to their complete dependence on the ecosystems in which they live, new approaches are needed to move us from our silo-based and compartmentalized approaches to transdisciplinarity**



- **Why should epidemiologists, all professions and, indeed, all people be concerned with matters of a global nature?**

→ Prevent harms *on a massive scale*

→ *The Right to Life for both present and future generations*



Core Values & Mission Statements

- Provide the anchor for our activity and collective motivation
- From our profession's **Ethics Guidelines (2012)**: *... maintain, enhance, and promote health in communities worldwide ... work to protect the public health interest above any other interest ...*



The Earth Charter

A four-page **soft law** instrument ... to save us from ourselves

PREAMBLE (Values followed by four principles)

- ***Respect and care for the community of life***
- ***Ecological integrity***
- ***Social and economic justice***
- ***Democracy, non-violence, and peace***

THE WAY FORWARD (Commitment to EC values)

<http://www.earthcharter.org/>

http://earthcharter.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf

Accessible in 53 different languages at

<http://earthcharter.org/discover/download-the-charter/>



I. Respect and care for the community of life

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. **Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.**



II. Ecological Integrity

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
- 6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.**
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.



III. Social and Economic Justice

- 9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.**
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.



IV. Democracy, Non-Violence and Peace

- 13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.**
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.



The Earth Charter

- **Encourages interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches for addressing complex social policy questions that also integrate health**



The Earth Charter and Environmental Epidemiology

- **Prevention in focus –**

**for the support of *all* life and its
inter-dependence**



RIGHTS vs. DUTIES

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**

And, since 2000:

- **The Earth Charter (a declaration of human responsibilities)**



Rights-Based Arguments in Support of the EC

- **The Earth Charter (EC) is the only document that:**
 - ***Supports Ecological Integrity rights***
 - ***Has Biocentrism at its core***
 - ***Integrates the dependence of human health on Ecological Integrity, and hence “the right to life” for present and future generations***
 - ***Extends a right to precaution in policy-making (benefits to whom? risks to whom?)***
 - ***Explicitly defends future generations***

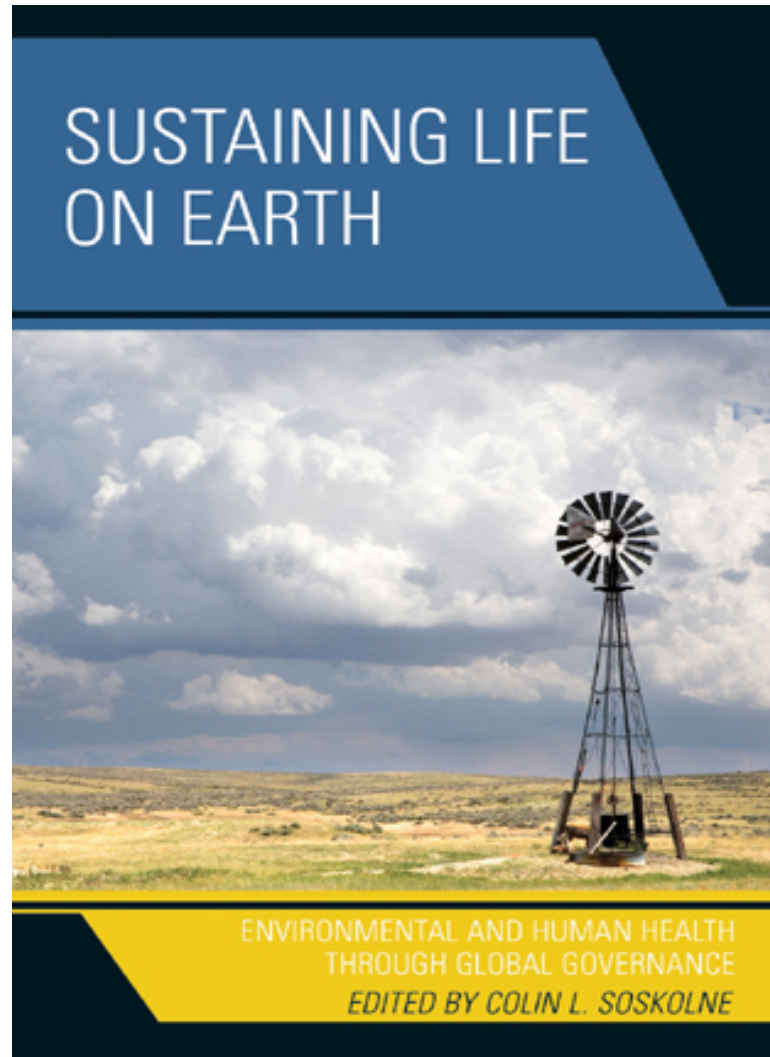


A 2008 book anchored in The Earth Charter

Sustaining Life on Earth: Environmental and Human Health through Global Governance

- www.LexingtonBooks.com/ISBN/0739117297

Rowman & Littlefield (2008)





Florida Gulf Coast University, United States



- **Infusing The Earth Charter into Research and Curriculum: One American University's Example**
- ***Peter Blaze Corcoran, and A. James Wohlpart***
- <http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/images/uploads/20-FloridaGulf,%20UnitedStates.pdf>

The Use of The Earth Charter at the Primary Teachers Education Department



**UNIVERSITY
OF CRETE**

- **The Heart of the Matter:
Infusing Sustainability Values
in Education: Experiences of
ESD with the Earth Charter
(2014)**
- ***Nelly Kostoulas-Makrakis***
- <http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/images/uploads/Ech91-95.pdf>

Beyond Cognitive Learning: Facilitating a Reconnection between the Community and Nature



UNIVERSIDAD
DE GRANADA

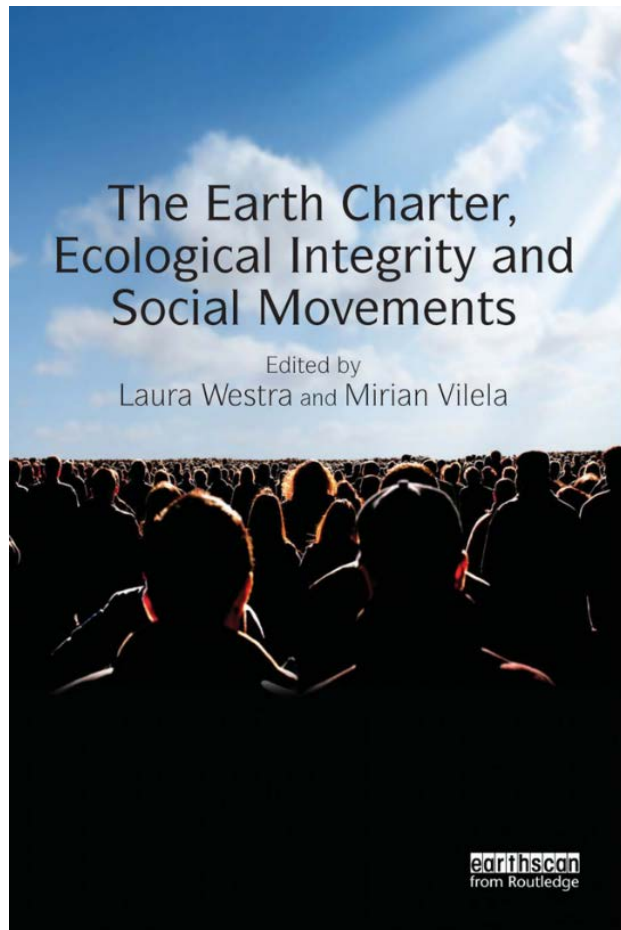
- **The Heart of the Matter: Infusing Sustainability Values in Education: Experiences of ESD with the Earth Charter (2014)**
- **Celebrating the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development**
- ***Alfonso Fernández Herrería***
- <http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/images/uploads/ECh79-82.pdf>

Cultivating Good Water and The Earth Charter. The experience of Itaipu Binacional in Brazil



- **The Heart of the Matter:
Infusing Sustainability Values
in Education: Experiences of
ESD with the Earth Charter
(2014)**
- **Celebrating the UN Decade of
Education for Sustainable
Development**
- ***Nelton Friedrich***
- **<http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/images/uploads/ECh20-24.pdf>**

The Earth Charter as an environmental policy instrument in Mexico



- **A soft law or hard policy perspective (2014)**
- *Franciso Javier Camarena Juarez*
- ***In: The Earth Charter, Ecological Integrity and Social Movements (2014)***



CONCLUSIONS

- If humanity is to achieve a change in trajectory, reflections on implementing **The Earth Charter** could shed light on more effective strategies for expanding success
- The role of environmental epidemiology in evaluating the potential of the **EC** to limit impacts from upstream determinants of health warrants urgent consideration



Discussion

This presentation will be posted to

www.colinsoskolne.com