

THRIVABLE INSIGHTS FROM THE THRIVABILITY MATTERS WEBINAR

Hi, passionate thrivability enthusiast. We live in unprecedented times. The numbers prove that climate change is here to stay. Social injustices corrupt the very fabric of our society, and misinformation and false narratives clog our devices through mainstream and social media. It's important to have reliable information from people who stand to gain nothing from sharing it with you. A person's agenda defines their motivation. THRIVE's agenda is to assist others to build a thrivable future, while our passionate volunteers walk the talk to deliver an authenticity that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Every month, THRIVE delivers a knowledge-filled [webinar](#), straight to your screens, providing statistics, facts, tips, tricks, and hints on how we can solve the problems our world faces everyday. from new innovations and discoveries, to the actions that people and communities take every day to make our world just a little more thrivable.

Each month, a particular solution is unpacked, disseminated, and investigated, to see how it applies to us and how we can play as a global team, on the playing field of Earth, to reach these goals. It isn't enough for us to sit passively by and let governments and businesses make our decisions for us. After all, their motivation is driven by their agenda. What does that mean for us?

Our aim is to arm you with the knowledge to change from being simply sustainable to terrifically thrivable. Therefore, I'd like to introduce you to Nik Metaxa-Schwarten. He was an esteemed guest for the August 2024 Thrivability Matters Webinar, who spoke to us on SDG 14 & 15 : Life Below Water and On Land. Nik's focus was on understanding our oceans as a means of understanding how plastic pollution affects our oceans, and how we can mitigate their impacts. The thrivable insights that follow are his precious pearls of wisdom that he was generous enough to share with us during the Q&A session that follows every webinar.

INTRODUCING NIK METAXA-SCHWARTEN



Nik Metaxa-Schwarten has worked nearly 30 years in Executive Consulting, focusing on services for international top-level executives. His clients included Cx-Executives from ABN AMRO, Avaya, BMW, Microsoft, and ZURICH and other international corporations.

After graduating as a CSR Manager in 2012, he adopted the CSR Guideline ISO 26000:2010. In 2017, he moved to the Philippines, dedicating himself to four Sustainable Development Goals.

He co-founded “Changemakers Manila,” a volunteer group with over 1,500 members. He conceptualised the #YES18 campaign for the ICC 2018 to help young government officials in the Philippines to tackle global problems.

His core cause is ocean plastic pollution. Inspired by Pope Francis’ World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, he announced “The Plastic Plug” in 2019 and formed the x.1 foundation to empower communities in Southeast Asia. He is a member of the United Nations Ocean Decade and his campaign “PROUD·PH celebrates MANAMo” was endorsed by UNESCO in 2022.

Nik combines an analytical German mind with Mediterranean empathy.

Q & A

I understand the natural resources in the ocean have not been fully mapped yet. The potential of food for the human population is thought to support humans for centuries if not forever.

What do you think about this?

This question highlights significant uncertainties faced by researchers and citizens alike. While the existing body of research on ocean resources is vast, it remains inadequate for making reliable assumptions. We must recognise that our understanding of the ocean is still limited and often leads to inflated expectations regarding its capacity to sustain human populations.

Firstly, while recovery regulations for certain marine species like whales and tuna have shown some success, the unprecedented killing rates in history have severely impacted these populations. For instance, the sperm whale population experienced drastic declines during the whaling peaks of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although whaling decreased following the rise of alternatives like kerosene and electricity, the advent of industrialised fishing has led to overexploitation, threatening the survival of many species. Thus, claiming that we can depend on the ocean’s resources indefinitely may be misguided.

Secondly, our approach to utilising ocean resources reveals a troubling trend of exploitation. Historical practices, such as dynamite fishing, have devastated coastal ecosystems. Moreover, current aquaculture practices mirror land-based agricultural issues, including pollution and reliance on antibiotics. If we are to sustain ocean resources, we must

adopt responsible practices, such as protecting marine biodiversity and implementing sustainable fishing methods.

Recent studies indicate that the state of fish stocks may be worse than previously understood, with many being overfished or having collapsed due to optimistic assessments and ignored scientific recommendations. Furthermore, the prevalence of hidden fishing vessels complicates our understanding of global fish stocks. While there is room for optimism, the evidence suggests a critical need for comprehensive reforms to protect marine ecosystems and ensure long-term sustainability.

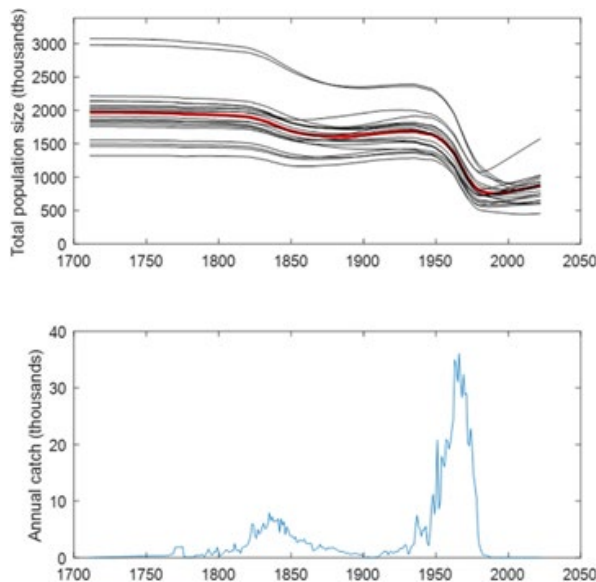


Image: Current global population size, post-whaling trend and historical trajectory of sperm whales.

Sources:

- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.adr5487>
- <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adl6282>
- <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06825-8>

How can we foster a sense of empathy and wonder for the natural world, recognising the essential role of water in supporting life? Should this education begin in the home, where values and habits are formed, or in educational settings, where students can engage with interdisciplinary curricula and hands-on learning experiences?

Thank you for raising such an important question. Fostering empathy and wonder for the natural world, particularly regarding the role of water in sustaining life, is crucial.

I believe this education should begin in the home, where foundational values and habits are formed. However, we must acknowledge that many parents may lack the empathy needed to guide the next generation. Therefore, educational settings should also promote a nurturing environment that complements home learning.

Early childhood experiences are pivotal, as they shape our perceptions of nature. Engaging grandparents or elderly mentors can help bridge this gap, instilling empathy and respect for the natural world.

Additionally, we must consider the societal changes that may hinder these efforts, particularly in Western cultures, where respect for the elderly has diminished. A collective approach that unites family and educational environments can facilitate a deeper connection to our planet.

What are the challenges and opportunities in achieving the targets while balancing the needs of coastal communities that depend on both marine and terrestrial resources?

This great question is unfortunately a gate opener to a hundred pages of answers 😊.

But I sense a deeper point here. And it has been addressed when I tried to talk briefly (20 minutes are not enough) about the “grind” and the whale hunting. Did you watch the whole documentary? In one situation the reporter is invited to eat with a family, and they serve whale meat. When then asked about the frequency of eating it, the family admitted: “Not so often anymore”. He drilled deeper: “Why” – “I don’t know. I guess we eat more pizza now”.

The needs of coastal communities were never the problem. The little fishing village could have been still living in the paradise that Cousteau’s teams found a few decades ago, where fishing with bare hands a few meters from the shore would feed the whole village.

With the introduction of feeding a massive growing urban population with the same resources, the fast and efficient transportation in cool chains, the industrialisation of fishing began and led to an unmanageable situation. When fishermen began to use dynamite and destroyed the breeding places, they accelerated the inability of the ocean to feed its coastal communities.

The answer is really not comfortable. Constant and endless growth is simply not possible.

As Gus Speth aptly noted, “I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation.” This

highlights the core challenge we face: the need for a shift in values and priorities.

The underlying issue remains the consumer-driven demand that often overshadows local needs.

Opportunities lie in fostering ocean literacy and promoting sustainable practices, but this will require time and a collective effort to reshape societal values.

Educating future generations about the dangers of consumerism and the importance of sustainability is essential, even if it means challenging deeply held desires.

I am sorry, I have no good answer for you here. Speth’s cultural and spiritual transformation is the opportunity. Greed and consumerism is the challenge.



Many countries have implemented recycling initiatives to prevent plastic from ending up in our oceans. However, despite the presence of recycling bins and programs, some governments continue to export waste to developing countries, where it often isn’t properly processed and may end up polluting the environment.

For example, while France promotes its plastic recycling efforts, it has been reported that French waste is being shipped to Indonesia, where it frequently ends up discarded in the streets and eventually in the ocean.

What steps can individuals and communities take to ensure proper recycling and disposal if government practices fail to support these efforts?

Thank you for the opportunity to address this significant issue. I've previously discussed this topic in detail during Q&A and would like to clarify some misconceptions that have emerged.

While the GPML (Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter) provides a valuable database, it is important to recognise that the accuracy and completeness of this information can vary.

The GMPL data about imported plastic waste further supports the absence of a direct correlation. When examining various reports on the leading polluters within countries, it becomes evident that both global and national brands frequently appear among the top offenders.

It is important to note that when waste is imported from other countries, it is often handled by companies aiming to recycle or repurpose that waste, such as converting it to energy or managing it in landfills under contractual agreements. Additionally, the assertion that most trash entering rivers originates from landfills has been challenged by my own research, which indicates that this claim is primarily based on statistical assumptions derived from a limited number of studies.

In summary, while there are significant challenges in waste management, it is vital to critically assess the available data and address these misconceptions as we work toward effective solutions.

Since 2002, when Ocean literacy conferences and workshops first started, in your opinion, what has changed since then, and what needs to be done more?

An excellent question, which I cannot fully answer in a scientific way. Obviously, we came a long way from being forgotten in the US National Education Standards to last June's Ocean Literacy World Conference in Venice. UNESCO's Ocean Literacy efforts inside the United Nations Ocean Decade framework have been inspiring scientists, teachers, and activists around the world.

While concrete evidence of impacts are difficult to obtain, a significant change is reflected in a presidential proclamation from the former President of the Philippines, emphasising the need to harmonise programs that raise awareness of maritime issues. This indicates a shift in political perspective toward viewing the ocean as more than just a resource for exploitation. However, the post-pandemic focus on profit and economic recovery has undermined these efforts. Outside of the Philippines, I can only reference one example from Greece.

A notable example of international collaboration is the Mediterranean Digital Ocean Twin, a breakthrough made possible by extensive literacy and awareness campaigns from United Nations bodies, with significant funding from the European Union. This highlights the need for continued efforts in ocean literacy and awareness.

In the Philippines, a maritime and archipelagic nation, ocean-related literature has existed for some time; however, it remains largely romanticised and simplistic, lacking integration into the school

curriculum. There is a pressing need for the Department of Education to evolve in this regard, which would require teacher training and the development of educational materials. Additionally, incorporating indigenous wisdom by creating knowledge databases from fishermen's tales could blend traditional knowledge with modern science for a more balanced approach.

Positive impacts are also being observed through the Freediver community. This accessible sport engages young people, with captivating images and videos of "mermaids" and couples diving together raising more awareness about the ocean than many previous efforts.

Financing is essential for advancing ocean literacy initiatives. It is crucial for funding from European and other countries to be allocated with specific requirements for promoting ocean literacy among the population.

Additionally, ocean literacy should be integrated into the planning of future educational materials. Rather than simply printing new books, it is important to observe existing cycles and prepare resources thoughtfully.

Finally, we need one big thing: Respect for the biggest and probably most important biosphere of the planet. A respect which has been completely lost over the last century and must be rebuilt from scratch.



One possible way to ensure sustainable oceans is through an “Enhanced Consumer Responsibility Act”. How can companies step up to this without waiting for the government to act through policies or regulations? Your thoughts...

In the context of Confucianism, we can consider the concepts of higher and lower justice to frame the role of companies in fostering consumer responsibility. Higher justice emphasizes moral integrity and the greater good, while lower justice focuses on adherence to laws and regulations.

While government policies are essential for establishing lower justice by addressing littering and promoting consumer responsibility, companies can embody higher justice by taking proactive steps that reflect moral responsibility. For instance, they can create affordable and accessible sustainable packaging solutions that encourage responsible consumption, aligning their practices with the greater good of environmental sustainability.

Moreover, companies should engage in awareness campaigns that connect product use with environmental impact, embodying higher justice by educating consumers about the consequences of their actions. Instead of merely organizing beach cleanups, businesses can focus on fostering a deeper understanding of responsible waste management, thereby promoting a culture of accountability.

Despite existing recycling efforts, convenience often undermines participation, leading to low return rates for recyclable materials. Companies can address this by simplifying recycling processes and providing incentives for consumers to engage in sustainable practices, reflecting a commitment to both higher and lower justice.

Ultimately, while companies face challenges in influencing consumer behaviour within a convenience-driven culture, they can drive meaningful change by developing innovative materials to replace plastic and promoting a shared sense of responsibility for waste management.

But the ultimate steps must happen inside the consuming society - companies are often bound by the very nature of a profit-oriented free market and its rules.



If you found value in this webinar, and loved it as much as we did, please register for our next exciting webinar at thrivabilitymatters.online.

We can't wait to see you there. Keep on thriving!



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