

# Radical Hope

The spirit of our time for overcoming the climate and biodiversity crises confronting us

LINDA NEUGEBAUER

with contributions

by Carlos M. Duarte



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*Our present defines the tipping point. Here we take a stand for our sustainable global future. The goal is no longer to bring society to a past burdened with guilt or a severely degraded present that has utopian or dystopian prospects, but to a better and possible world of tomorrow, sustained by radical hope.*

## OPINION PIECE

# Radical hope: the spirit of our times to overcome the climate and biodiversity crisis

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**SUMMARY:** We live in a unique moment in time confronted as we are with the worst projections ever in human history for the future. This creates fear about the future, with increasing numbers of all ages worldwide suffering from so-called “eco-anxiety.” Radical hope goes right to the heart of this dark hopelessness, prompted by the dual crises of climate change and mass extinction, to remind us that only by taking action based on knowledge and love can we make the world a better place. To be faint of heart and wait for the worst has never been and will never be the solution. Radical hope dissuades us from believing that the world will change for the better all by itself. We have to get going in making the world as we want it to be. Thus, radical hope arises from those people who do not simply accept our current dual crises and who act to overcome them with courage and determination. Radical hoppers are therefore the people who create the “spirit of our times” — a spirit that is urgently needed if we are to realistically achieve a sustainable world in which life is better than it is now. And to succeed in building the first sustainable generation, the world’s attention needs to be focused where it has not been previously: on the ocean. Because on this blue planet, this unique water system is the thriving force that sustains all life.

## 1. WHAT IS THE CURRENT SPIRIT OF THE WORLD?

The world of today peers into a future with forecasts ranging from bad to catastrophic. We are preoccupied with a growing number of events that are vital to our survival. Will we still find enough resources to survive in the future or will famine and water wars, floods and forest fires shape our new normal? Our parents used to think that “our children should have it better one day,” whereas today’s parents think “hopefully our children won’t have it all too bad in the future.” It is no wonder that this oppressive outlook makes the vast majority of the world’s population anxious about the future and firmly convinced that our living conditions will continue to deteriorate. The fact that young people are particularly affected should be a serious cause for concern. A recent global survey revealed that 75% of them agreed that “the future is frightening.”<sup>1</sup> This situation has spawned a new syndrome, so-called “eco-anxiety,” from which an increasing number of people of all age groups suffer.

The world around us does indeed look to be a very bleak place. And it is this very darkness that has driven out our spirit. A spirit that is convinced that it is still possible for us to strive for a better future. So do we really want to continue to feel faint and be paralyzed by this fear? Do we seriously want to throw in the towel?

1. Caroline Hickman, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R. Eric Lewandowski, Elouise E. Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, Lise van Susteren, “Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: A global survey,” *Lancet Planetary Health* 5 (December 2021), e863–e873.

The aforementioned image of our parents' commitment to working hard for a better life for us contrasts with the picture evoked by today's adults, who bury their heads in the sand, waiting for the worst to come.

But where has all our vital force gone? Where has our willingness to work and take actions for a better life gone? Allowing this life-affirming spirit to return does not mean that we are suddenly unafraid. It does mean that we, as a global society, recognize the reality and the challenges that lie ahead, and yet take action to overcome them. Often we hear the sentiment "the coming generations will do it." Definitely not! This again proves that a driving spirit is missing! We cannot foist our own responsibility onto the next generation just because it's easier, just because we are proving unable to act. We, the adults of today, are the only ones able to take the necessary actions now. We are the ones called upon to find and open the door for the next generation, giving them the perspective of a better life. And yes, a better life, because a sustainable world, where the needs of people are balanced with those of nature and the economy, is indeed better than the world we grew up in. When it comes to creating future prospects, we should never have false modesty. On the contrary, it is precisely in these apparently dark times that we should continue to wish for a better life for future generations and to simply work for it.

All this illustrates that we urgently need a new spirit for our time. A spirit born out of the refusal to accept that there are supposedly few or no solutions to the current dual crises and that we are simply waiting for our situation to worsen. One that empowers us to take effective action to overcome the darkness cast by these crises with perseverance and willpower. And one that drives us to rebuild our world today into one in which our sustainable way of living will have positive effects on us, on all other beings, and on the planet as a whole. But this requires something indispensable. Something we seem to have forgotten. We vitally need the whole world to pay attention to the global ocean. This life-sustaining water system from which all life originates. Because without this one unified ocean, there would be no life on Earth.

*If we believe that we can build the first sustainable generation, then we must change! We must act and recognize that the ocean as the life force of this planet is fundamental for overcoming climate change and biodiversity loss.*

## 2. . WHAT IS RADICAL HOPE?

***We must create radical hope.  
Each one of us and all of us together.***

Before plunging into the definition of radical hope, it is first necessary to reach a fundamental understanding of the meaning of each of its components: "radical" and "hope." Because the two are nearly always misunderstood. The word hope is often conflated with optimism, but hope and optimism are not the same. Optimism relies on external circumstances and if these are favorable, there is reason for optimism. Optimism is thus the belief that the world will change for the better all by itself.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, hope is neither a belief nor a prediction about the future.<sup>3</sup> Hope arises from the refusal to accommodate oneself to unacceptable situations by acting to overcome

2. Jonathan Sacks, *Celebrating Life: Finding Happiness in Unexpected Places* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 175.

3. Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman, *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2018).

them with courage and determination. Thus, hope is what we do<sup>4</sup> to make the world a better place, especially in situations in which success is not guaranteed and the odds are against us. Optimism and hope therefore share only a positive expectation of the future. However, when things become difficult and fall apart, only hope can give us the powerful injection of motivation we need to act meaningfully for positive change. Thus, it is the people who act in deeply difficult situations who give hope to the world.

Now let's inspect the meaning of the second word, "radical." This term is often taken to be an "aggressive word" or immediately associated with radicalism, equating it with an extreme political or ideological orientation. None of these meanings are correct, even remotely, when referring to radical hope. To avoid such misinterpretations we need to return to the word's forgotten origins: it derives from the Latin word "radix," which means "root." But what does a "root" have to do with hope? Well, nothing can survive or grow strong without roots. And the deeper they go, the greater their power to survive, even in the most adverse circumstances, such as those today. But what are the roots of radical hope?

To get to the bottom of a problem and to solve it comprehensively at this level does not require much. Only two things: knowledge and love. Why? In times of crisis, everything goes dark, blinding us to ways out, to possible solutions. Only the development of knowledge can then light the path, being, inherently, the foundation of identity and social change. And why love? Well, in simple terms, love is the driver of our sense of the "good and beautiful," making sure the solutions we seek truly create a world where life is better and more beautiful, but also one that is realistic and possible. And what we consider good and beautiful today has changed from the past. We adults now know that our parents' pursuit of greater wealth and a higher standard of living is not the lifestyle we want to prioritize today. We now define a better future as a sustainable world where the well-being of the entire planet is important. A world in which we are able to balance our own needs and prosperity with those of other living beings and the natural world around us, integrating the economy into the whole.

And there is something surprisingly powerful about the solid root system of knowledge and love. There is a nourishing synergy between the two, making each all the stronger. Love can be ignited by knowledge, but it can also be directed more purposefully. In turn, the search for knowledge can be driven by love. However, it is important to note that love is not just an emotional state, but a relation that combines aspects of union, permanence, and reciprocity.<sup>5</sup> And there is further power in the combination of love and knowledge. The combination brings out a whole range of our good qualities. Qualities such as courage, determination, perseverance, motivation, enthusiasm, and/or imagination emerge. All of these positive qualities are necessary if we are to be successful in what we do. Let's take courage as an example. Someone who loves sincerely can have the greatest courage, but if this person also has the knowledge that something is possible, then this courage becomes invincible. That is why the positive effects of combining knowing and loving as the roots of radical hope are indescribably immense.

To make a long story short, here is how radical hope gets defined:

4. MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *Hope: A User's Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022), 50.

5. Anna Mense, "Liebe und Emotionen: Erschöpft sich Lieben im Fühlen?" *Philokoles 24* (Issue on Love), February 2020, 3–35.

**What is Radical Hope?**

*Radical hope emerges in the climate and biodiversity crises. It arises from the refusal to accept that there is little that we can do to overcome our global challenges, and that all we can do is wait for the worst to happen. Radical hope replaces the current pessimistic “fear mode” with the radically hopeful “action mode” that is focused on a single goal: to take solution-oriented action until we have achieved a better life for us, our children, and the coming generations. But also for all the other living beings and the nature that surrounds us. Because in a sustainable world, we all count on this planet.*

*Accordingly, radical hope can be defined by what we do individually and as a global society, based on knowledge and love, to build the first sustainable generation, using the soil of the dual crises as our powerful fertilizer.*

*In all of this, radical hope focuses the world’s attention on the ocean and prioritizes the rebuilding of all key marine flora and fauna that sustain the entire ecosystem, both marine and terrestrial. Because radical hope reminds us that the ocean, as the planet’s largest carbon sink and the thriving source of life on Earth, is the first and best indicator that guides our path to overcoming climate change and biodiversity loss.*



Figure: Radical Hope

### 3. WHY IS THIS THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES? *“Good times create weak people. Weak people create bad times. Bad times create strong people. Strong people create great times.”*

***Tony Robbins***

A spirit manifests itself in the way we think and get things done. It reflects the ideas and beliefs of a generation at a particular time in history. As a global society, we have experienced very good times, possibly the best times in human history. Times of prosperity and higher standards of living for far more people than ever before, yet there are still some major inequalities. And it is precisely these times that have led to the current dual crises. Our pursuit of wealth is out of balance with the natural world of this planet. And now we are entering worrying times in which the whole of humanity is threatened as never before, despite greater progress than in any previous era. This uncertainty has affected the spirit of much of global society. It is also the result of a constant bombardment by the media, which brings only dire omens but little in the way of solutions, blaming society as a whole. What we all need now is a new and strong spirit that will increase our ability to overcome the challenges we face. For we all agree that failure has never been and will never be an option.

These good times, combined with higher standards of living, have not only had a side effect of expanding the limits or frontiers of our planet. They have also made the current generation more comfortable and therefore less aware of real threats, making them more vulnerable to bad times. Much of today's generation has never really had to work hard for a good life. But today, in times of climate and biodiversity crises, the tables have turned dramatically. Suddenly, the first generation that “always had it good” is facing a bleak world. No one was prepared. No one asked for it. But here it is, the darkness of the great global dual crises, confronting us with grim prospects that some, in their eagerness to blame and frighten society, call “hell.”

In times of great crises like the one we are experiencing, there can be no ifs and buts. We have to accept the current situation with all its challenges and just take it on. Because there are no problems, only tasks to be solved. And our task is to transform the darkness of crises into good fertilizer that will help us build the first sustainable generation. All together, as one global society. And along the way, we will see the first successes of our work. We will see how we can inspire and serve as a model for our children and the next generation. We will see how together we can celebrate the recovery of endangered animal and plant populations and rejoice in their existence. We will see the economy change and more and more products and services come to market that are not only good for nature, but also for us humans.

We are the generation that is creating the “spirit of our time” in a moment that seems almost impossible. And we will be looked back on for a long time in human history. We have not surrendered and we will never surrender. Because in the deepest hour of darkness, we decided to build the first sustainable generation together. And we will succeed. We have all the capabilities to do it. Is there a better time in human history than now to be part of this great change?

*We are the spirit of our time!*

*We are the ones building the first sustainable generation!*



***“We are not doomed. This is not the last generation on Earth. Our ancestors took on problems, applying their ingenuity to solving them. We can do the same with the problems that face us today.”***

***Steven Pinker***

#### **4. WHY DOES RADICAL HOPE CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SUSTAINABILITY CONSCIOUSNESS?**

Radical hope contributes to the development of our sustainability consciousness because consciousness arises in difficult and painful times when we are challenged to grow beyond ourselves if we do not want to perish. And it is because of the climate and biodiversity crises that we find ourselves in precisely this dark and challenging moment. So we have to seize it and evolve with it.

But how do we define the consciousness we need to develop for a sustainable way of life? Well, sustainability consciousness can be seen as an evolution of environmental consciousness, which was first defined by psychologists in the United States in 1970. Originally, the concept of this type of consciousness was defined by three areas related to the environment: knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.<sup>6</sup>

Since environmental knowledge does not necessarily lead to actual commitment, the behavioral component has been more often excluded from the term.<sup>6</sup> However, this equates consciousness with knowledge, which is definitely incorrect. Consciousness requires the physical experience and evidence consistent with knowledge to be successfully developed. Knowledge alone does not produce consciousness.

For something to become conscious, we must physically experience our knowledge- and love-based actions with all our senses. Knowledge without action and action without knowledge both indicate a lack of consciousness. Therefore, a person develops sustainability consciousness when he or she has knowledge about a problem and possible solutions, and thus develops the necessary attitudes that support his or her pro-sustainable actions.

As radical hope drives our actions based on knowledge and love to build the first sustainable generation, it contributes directly to reaching a new state of consciousness: “sustainability consciousness.”

***Our present future in achieving ocean recovery defines the future present of the human generations to populate this planet.***

#### **5. WHY IS THE OCEAN THE MOST IMPORTANT ALLY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS?**

The ocean is the origin and driving force of all life on this planet, but also on all other planets where we know there was once life. It is simple: no ocean, no life. As its condition is critical to our ability to survive, it is of crucial importance that we all give the state of the ocean our undivided attention. And what shape is it in? According to science, our ocean is in a depleted, half-empty state with many species on the brink of extinction. Take coral reefs, for instance, the first ecosystems threatened by functional extinction<sup>8</sup> within this century. Science also tells us that we have a decade left to take the actions required to set the ocean on a path of recovery.

6. M. P. Maloney and M. Ward, “Ecology: Let’s hear from the people, *American Psychologist*, 28 (July 1973), 583–586.

7. Udo Kuckartz, “Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungsarbeiten über Umweltbewußtsein und Umweltverhalten,” Chap. 2 of *Umweltbewusstsein und Umweltverhalten*. Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1998.

8. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), September 2019.

However, nearly everybody is talking about the climate crisis and increasingly the massive loss in biodiversity as well, but almost all forget about the ocean and almost all activities relate primarily to the terrestrial world. This would be like fixing the top-floor windows in a house that has collapsed, instead of restoring its foundations to prevent future disasters. But no house can be preserved without its foundation, just as our planet cannot survive without its ocean. To be clear: no ocean, no future on this planet. Our existence is tied to the ocean. We belong to the ocean. We must wake up to this ancient truth<sup>9</sup> before it is too late.

When it comes to the climate crisis, it is all about the ocean. Because our ocean is the largest carbon sink in the world. Seagrass can be thirty-five times more effective in reducing carbon than a tropical rainforest such as the Amazon.<sup>10</sup> But why are we still focusing primarily on forests? Over a whopping third of total carbon emissions comes from the destruction of our natural systems. Thus, rebuilding marine life is one of the most important measures to successfully overcome both crises, that of climate and that of biodiversity. It is decisively the age of the ocean.

But how we are supposed to restore our ocean successfully when the ocean is not given the intrinsic value it fundamentally has on this planet? Consequently, ocean conservation is the least funded area within philanthropy worldwide: out of all the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 14 – life below water – has received the least support!<sup>11</sup>

If we are to achieve the goal of becoming the first sustainable generation, we must all come together to put the ocean at the center of our attention. Otherwise, it will remain in an empty and degraded state, condemning generations of humans to live on this planet in conditions not yet experienced.

## 6. WHY IS “OCEANUS OMNI” THE REVIVED WISDOM OF THE FIRST SUSTAINABLE GENERATION?

How is it possible that the ocean, the foundation of this planet, has been globally forgotten and reduced to a simple, silent backdrop? The reason for this can be found in the Code of Justinian,<sup>12</sup> on which all Western legal codes are based. This Code declared in the first millennium that the ocean was “terra nullius,” the “land of no one,” and that the life it contained was “res nullius,” the “life of no one.” This “tragedy of the commons”<sup>13</sup> has led the ocean to its current depleted state. Because as Aristotle already pointed out, everything that does not belong to man will receive little or no attention.

To reverse this problem, we must transform the ocean from a “land of no one” into “our ocean of all,” our so-called “oceanus omni.” This is necessary and true. First, because the ocean is not land, but an ocean. And second, because it is not isolated from us, but connected to all of us as the basis of our life on Earth. Our global ocean is truly nothing but our oceanus omni, a revived wisdom of the first sustainable generation.

***“Perhaps it is not the view into the universe that gives us a better understanding of the world, but the ocean that will change even our view of the universe.”***

**Chema Herrera**

9. Epeli Hau'ofa, “Our sea of islands,” in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa (eds.), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Suva, Fiji: Beake House, 1993, 16.

10. Elizabeth Cleod, Gail L. Chmura, Steven Bouillon, Rodney Salm, Mats Björk, Carlos M. Duarte, Catherine E. Lovelock, William H. Schlesinger, and Brian R. Silliman, “A blueprint for blue carbon: Towards an improved understanding of the role of vegetated coastal habitats in sequestering CO<sub>2</sub>,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 9 (December 2011), doi: 10.1890/110004.552–560.

11. “Guterres Outlines Four Recommendations to Help Us All ‘Save Our Ocean,’” United Nations, UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1121402>; Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/oceans/>.

12. Codex Justinianus. *Medieval Sourcebook: The Institutes*, 535 CE, Internet History Sourcebooks Project, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/sbook.asp>.

13. Garret Hardin, “The tragedy of the commons,” *Science*, 162 (1969), 1243–8.

## 7. WHO ARE RADICAL HOPERS?

***Think “oceanically”! Act sustainably!***

One day future generations will look back. But what will they see? Did we give up and leave them alone with a destroyed blue planet with little or no chance of recovery? Or did we actively work together for their better life when we had the opportunity? Radical hoppers live with the awareness that our actions today will shape the future of generations to come. And all they want to do now is take responsibility and act. They want future generations to be able to look back with pride, knowing that we were the ones who opened the door to a sustainable, better world. Out of this awareness, radical hoppers do not leave the shaping of our sustainable future to a few decision-makers who see it as a future too distant to be of their concern. They have recognized that our current challenge is less of a knowledge gap than an action gap. For them the previous “just talking” has now ceased to exist and is being replaced by “doing now.”

The following attitudes are particularly characteristic of radical hoppers because they are now essential for taking action and overcoming current pessimism.

### **Six characteristics that distinguish radical hoppers**

1. ***They do not accept the current bleak prospects of our crises and redefine what is possible.***
2. ***They seek a sustainable world and set themselves positive goals, but also realistic ones. Utopian or dystopian goals are simply a waste of time for them.***
3. ***They drive solution-oriented actions that bring about positive change, always based on knowledge and love.***
4. ***They are bold and disruptive and can think “outside the box.”***
5. ***They never surrender and act with determination and perseverance until the set goal is achieved.***
6. ***They raise ambitions and overcome current barriers and limits that hold us back from solutions.***

Radical hoppers therefore are the ones whose tenacity creates the needed “spirit of our times.” An oceanic spirit that thinks oceanically and acts sustainably.

**CONCLUSION**

Building the first sustainable generation seems like an almost impossible goal. The same goes for restoring the world ocean. In September 1962, when John F. Kennedy announced: “We choose to go to the moon,” few believed it was possible. It seemed like an impossible mission. But it took the will and vision of just a few people to get the best engineers to work on the Apollo 11 mission. The result was one of the most significant changes in human history. Landing a man on the moon was not only a feat and a demonstration of our human capabilities in the face of a previously impossible challenge. It also meant that there were no limits to our ability to conquer greater and more formidable frontiers. It ushered in the space age, which succeeded in taking our minds beyond the solar system. The same must apply here. We must conquer new frontiers and usher in the age of sustainability with the ocean as its foundation. It will take time, time we still have, but that we should no longer waste. And it will require us to work together to create a new spirit of our time that drives us to commit wholeheartedly to building a sustainable world. To achieve this, the world needs radical hope with a clear focus on the global ocean, our oceanus omni.

***Today we say:***

***We choose to go to the ocean to build the first sustainable generation.***

### *The Action Call for Radical Hope*

*Light the fire of radical hope for our ocean, our future.*

*This is our last chance.  
We have no other option.  
We have to fight for our survival, all together.*

*We have to fight for the Atlantic Ocean.  
We have to fight for the Pacific Ocean.  
We have to fight for the Indian Ocean.  
We have to fight for the Arctic Ocean.  
We have to fight for the Antarctic Ocean and all seas.  
Because it is one global ocean.*

*Carry the fire of radical hope to defend our future from the serious consequences of  
a depleted, empty ocean.*

*For whom?  
For you!  
For us!  
For generations to come!*

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Linda is an award-winning entrepreneur, economist, author, speaker, and philanthropy expert with over two decades of international experience in the nonprofit sector, working for the smallest to the largest organizations around the globe.

Driven as a mom by her love for children and the ocean, but also for people and life, the fire of radical hope was first kindled in her in 2019. The dramatically bleak future prospects that we all faced back then incited her to act to overcome them. In 2022 she founded Ocean us to rebuild the global ocean as the basis for securing the sustainable future of our planet.



**Oceanus**

Rebuilding marine life is still possible

**OCEAN US FOUNDATION**

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