

Central and Eastern Europeans and Climate Change

We Central and Eastern Europeans have for many centuries lived with an awareness of, and in partnership with, the environment around us. Sustainable agriculture and livestock rearing, responsible forestry, and ancient handicrafts and rituals that connect us to the land and natural world are deeply embedded in our cultures.

Roma/Gypsy people have from the earliest times been an integral part of Central and Eastern European societies. They have shared valuable knowledge—particularly about building, metalwork, medicine, connecting with animals, and nurturing communities and relationships—and their work has built much of our common civilisations.

Along with Romani/Gypsy people, all Central and Eastern Europeans have ancient skills, knowledge, and ways of organizing communities that could make a big difference to environmental movements. But this knowledge and these abilities have often been ignored, rejected, and overtaken by dominant economies and cultures.

Central and Eastern Europeans have been oppressed by a number of large empires that surround us. Our traditional communities have been replaced by societies modeled on global capitalism—societies based on greed, corruption, individualism, nationalism, xenophobia, antigypsyism,* and racism. This has divided us from each other and also from the majority of the world's population (Indigenous people and people of African, Asian, and Latin American heritage), who are at the forefront of fighting against climate change.

All this has limited the effectiveness of the environmental movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It has kept us from challenging the degradation of our natural environments—the contaminated soil, polluted water, and destruction of wildlife habitat—and made us collude with extensive coal, gas, and mineral mining.

But still the situation is hopeful. It is possible to limit the effects of climate change and completely restore the environment.

Big problems require big solutions, and the people of Central and Eastern Europe can play a key role in finding solutions that leave no human behind; that do not pit one group against another; that do not allow one group to benefit by taking advantage of another; that focus on collaboration, not division; that unify more and more people; and that focus on decisive actions to sustain all life.

We also need to become aware of where we may have “benefited” from oppressive policies and recover from the confusions that have led us to not challenge them.

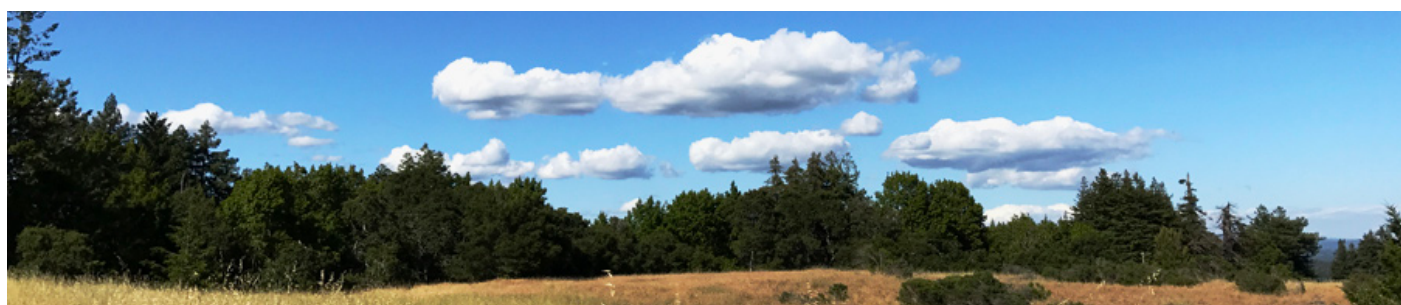
Sustaining All Life offers tools—for example, telling our personal stories—that can help us heal from how we have been affected by

- war and other violence;
- antigypsyism and other oppressions;
- economic crises;
- poverty;
- reliance on fossil fuel;
- divisive policies of narrow nationalism and xenophobia.

With healing comes clearer thinking and more accurate perspectives that make it possible to build a united environmental movement and create big solutions. As a united force, the people of Central and Eastern Europe, including Romani/Gypsy people, can play a key role in sustaining all life on Earth.

* Antigypsyism is the racism directed at Roma, Gypsy, and Sinti people; Travellers; and others who are stigmatized as “gypsies” in the public imagination. It is often used in a narrow sense to indicate anti-Roma attitudes, or negative stereotypes or hate speech in the public sphere. However, it includes a much wider spectrum of discriminatory practices, such as not valuing the contribution these groups make to society and to climate change activism.

Interpretation in some languages available upon request. Please inquire.



The Work of Sustaining All Life

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed if this is to happen. These changes will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background.

In *Sustaining All Life* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression) between nations and between groups of people within nations, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness among the populations of many countries, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of capitalism. *Sustaining All Life* works to address these issues and others.

The source of the environmental crisis

We modern humans have lived on the Earth for about 200,000 years. For much of this time we have struggled for survival. Ancient fears for our survival have been passed down to each generation and have resulted in societies based on exploitation, oppression, and division.

These societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the Earth. And they have come to rely on dividing us, scaring us, discouraging us, and hurting us in other ways, to keep us from making meaningful change.

The role of oppression

Oppression (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) is institutionalized in our societies. This makes it much more difficult for us to address and end climate change. All of us, at some point in our lives, are targeted by oppression. We are all harmed by it. Then we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Oppression is neither inherent nor inevitable in human beings. It arises from and operates on the basis of emotional hurt.

The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions.

This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. *Sustaining All Life* uses the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling* to help people build ongoing mutual support for this personal healing.

Healing from the hurts that drive oppression and other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist it. We may feel like there isn't time. We may feel that we have been able to succeed in life only by not showing anyone how much we've been hurt. We may feel ashamed of or embarrassed by our feelings. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it. We may feel it would be unbearable to look at and to feel those feelings again. Perhaps this is because we have had no opportunity to tell our stories or have not been treated well when we have tried to tell them.

In *Sustaining All Life* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts.

By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This will strengthen us in building our movements.

* Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved.

For more information, see:

www.rc.org/sustainingalllife

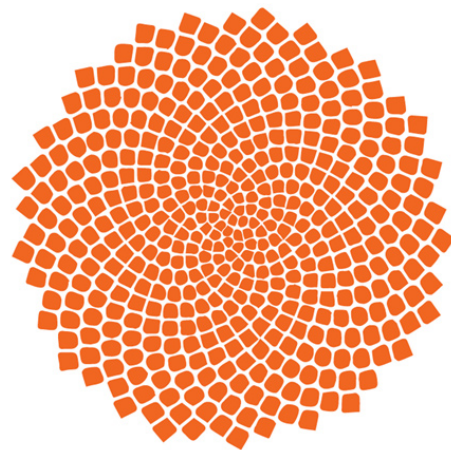
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