

Common Home of Humanity

A blueprint for global
governance

*What if we thought
of the Earth as an immense
condominium?*



COMMON
HOME
OF HUMANITY

Who are we?

Common Home of Humanity is a novel initiative conceived in 2016 in recognition of the enormous governance challenge of ensuring a sustainable future for humankind. A truly global and inter-disciplinary effort, the Common Home of Humanity works to build an international coalition of leading Earth System and sustainability scientists, socio-economists, legal experts, sovereign states, NGOs, international organisations, local authorities, academia and other stakeholders.

What do we propose?

Grounded in law and based on improved understanding of Earth System functioning, Common Home of Humanity proposes a governance model for safeguarding the Safe Operating Space of the Earth System— the conditions necessary for us to live safely and comfortably on Planet Earth. Our strategic objectives are:

- ✓ To secure the global legal recognition of our Safe Operating Space as a Natural Intangible Common Heritage of Humankind;
- ✓ To enable the development and implementation of an environmental-economic accounting system for the monitoring and protection of this Safe Operating Space.

How will we do this?

1. Identify the full set of intangible, interacting processes that make up a well-functioning Earth System. Earth System science has progressed significantly over the past decade. The Planetary Boundaries framework identifies nine key processes that must be maintained and respected to keep the Earth System in a healthy state, favourable for humankind. It is our Safe Operating Space, necessary for humanity to thrive on our “Common Home”.



2. Recognise the Safe Operating Space as a Natural Intangible Common Heritage of Humankind. So far, the success of the human society on Planet Earth has been made possible by a unique period in the history of the Earth System, which provides the favourable conditions for humanity to thrive – in short, a Safe Operating Space for humanity. This favourable state of the Earth System is therefore humanity’s *ultimate global common* – intangible and legally indivisible – and should be formally recognised as a new object of law. This includes the need for trusteeship to be exercised over such global common in the collective interest of humanity.

3. Create an Earth System Accounting Framework based on the Planetary Boundaries.

Building an integrated environmental and economic accounting framework would favour a socio-economic model, where proactively maintaining the Safe Operating Space would imply economic benefits, and therefore increased well-being. This requires setting planetary quotas, measuring the use and valuation of Earth System services. This valuation will only be possible if the existence of Earth System services is legally recognised by human society within the context of the new Natural Intangible Common Heritage of Humankind.

4. Apply a Planetary Condominium legal framework. The condominium is the only existing legal framework acknowledging the coexistence of different legal regimes (private property and co-ownership) within the same physical space. By scaling this model up to the planetary level, it is possible to reconcile the intangible functional system of the planet – the Safe Operating Space – with the tangible sovereignty of States. Such a legal model recognises planetary interdependencies (similar to those among tenants who inhabit the same building and depend on its common functional elements) as well as State sovereignty (similar to the ownership of an apartment in the building). States are the owners of their national territory (“apartment”) and equally trustees of the global commons and the Earth system (“building”).



A platform for organising our global interdependences

The Common Home of Humanity embraces Kant's statement that *"only in the pursuit of common interests can we guarantee our individual rights"*. We propose an opportunity for all nations, and all generations to come together around a common global heritage with no borders. The Common Home of Humanity works on the structural conditions to build trust and achieve collective action.

We believe that involvement in the two strategic objectives – resulting in a new model of equitable global governance – is an opportunity for all nations to acknowledge and own the need to protect the Safe Operating Space to successfully manage their relationship with the Earth System.

Our efforts will be directed towards working with the United Nations, which is currently the only Institution with both universal membership and the legitimacy to host such a global initiative. Ultimately, protecting and managing a legally recognised Safe Operating Space requires an independent trusteeship institution that – supported by a Scientific Commission – can and must act on behalf of all humanity for the management of our Planetary Condominium.

Join us!

The Common Home of Humanity is assembling a global consortium of thought leaders and experts within three groups that together, will move the collaboration forward: the Legal Working Group, the Earth System Accounting Framework Working Group and the Advisory Group. The Common Home of Humanity National Pilot Programme will serve as a trial for the accounting framework and countries are invited to join. Please consider donating your time and expertise to the consortium and join us in creating a new model for just and sustainable global governance.



FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Earth System?

The Earth System is the “*global environment as an integrated whole*”, a unique set of interacting physical, chemical, and biological global-scale cycles and energy flows that allow, and are regulated by, life on the planet. Operating beyond countries and borders, these global cycles are shared by every living thing on the planet, including humans. Maintained or damaged by our activities, they make up humanity’s *ultimate Global Common*. This unique system provides the necessary conditions we need to survive and thrive – the Safe Operating Space for humanity. If the functioning of the Earth System undergoes significant change, life as we know it will be severely affected.

What are the Planetary Boundaries?

What is the Safe Operating Space?

A favourable Earth System is identifiable today through the Planetary Boundaries framework (first introduced by Rockström, Steffen and colleagues in 2009), which defines nine critical Earth System processes (e.g., climate change, ozone depletion, biosphere integrity, and others) whose effective management is key to the maintenance of a resilient and accommodating state of the planet. The collection of these nine processes and their interactions, as well as their maintenance within scientifically defined limits is what is called the Safe Operating Space for humanity.

What is our Common Home?

A planet with an Earth System outside a favourable state cannot serve as our "Home". To build our Common Home is to build a human organisation capable of reconciling the individual interests of States with the common interests of all humankind, to ensure that the next generations have a stable, habitable Earth System on which they can survive and thrive. Our Common Home is a human construction set up to maintain the Safe Operating Space.

What are the Planetary Quotas?

First introduced by Meyer and Newman in 2017, the Planetary Quotas are limits for human interactions with the Earth System, based on the Planetary Boundaries, which are applicable to any scale of human activity. Where the Planetary Boundaries define the Safe Operating Space, the Planetary Quotas define what is needed for humanity to return to and live within this space.

Why the need for a legal recognition of the Safe Operating Space?

The fact that the favourable state of the Earth System is essentially composed of non-territorial and intangible elements should not constitute an insurmountable obstacle to its legal recognition. Without legal recognition of the Safe Operating Space, the Earth System and its critical processes will remain invisible to the economy and peripheral to the organisation and activities of human societies, with impacts treated as “externalities”.

How is the economic benefit possible under the Common Home of Humanity's proposal?

Under the Common Home of Humanity's governance model, externalities – through the new Common Intangible Heritage and the valuation of Earth System services – will be internalised and reflected in our economies. This will offer the first opportunity ever for nations to generate tangible economic benefits from reducing impacts or maintaining and improving the provision of Earth System services.

Why should the Earth System be recognised as an 'intangible' heritage?

In comparison to state territories or physical global commons such as the High Seas or the Seabed, the Earth System, along with its Safe Operating Space processes is an intangible object. Fortunately, human societies have a long history of recognising intangible assets and granting them legal protection. Examples include Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO), good will value of companies and intellectual property rights.

What is the Planetary Condominium?

A condominium is a legal object with a unitary structure and common functional systems, which belongs to multiple co-owners and in which different legal regimes coexist: each co-owner has private rights of ownership over determined parts (e.g. apartments), while sharing ownership over structural elements of common use (e.g. foundations) and functional systems (e.g. electricity). A Planetary Condominium (first conceived by Magalhães in 2007) is the result of scaling up the condominium model to planetary level. Under this model, the functional and spatial divisions between apartments and communal elements and systems are parallel to that of the State's territorial jurisdictions and the functional indivisibility of the Earth System.

How will this affect the Sovereignty of Nations?

The Common Home of Humanity recognises that a precondition for success of a fair global governance model is to maintain independence of nations in their decision-making processes. The condominium framework allows nations to retain sovereignty and the power of decision-making for their welfare within the context of a system of governance that ensures the protection of the Earth System and incentivises the protection and provision of common benefits, represented by the Planetary Condominium.

How does the Common Home of Humanity fit with existing global agreements and initiatives?

The Common Home of Humanity brings a new integrated legal framework with a trans-disciplinary approach that will enable new perspectives for solutions on many multilateral agreements developed independently, exploring their contribution to the broader goal of a just, multi-faceted global governance model. Ultimately, this will facilitate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, thus ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Common Home of Humanity is headquartered at the University of Porto, Portugal, and operated under the aegis of the NGO, ZERO - Sustainable Earth System Association, until its legal establishment. It is currently supported by the Portuguese Ministry of Environment as well as the Municipalities of Porto and Gaia.

For more information please visit www.commonhomeofhumanity.org

VISION OF THE COMMON HOME OF HUMANITY

To create a world in which all countries work together to preserve our planet's safe operating space for humans and all other living species.

For societies to be driven by a new economic model that incentivises the maintenance of nature and the provision of Earth System Services, not its depletion.

To build an inherent sense of respect for and belonging to the Earth System – our Common Home – as citizens of Planet Earth, enriched by our individual cultural diversities.

