

# The Mesothalassia Bike-Tour: (Re)Discovering Water by Riding With Scientists

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*A short prologue, tinged of blues*

*If you have built castles in the air, your work  
need not be lost; that is where they should be.  
Now put the foundations under them*

—Henry David Thoreau

While looking at the empty A4-page of my PC, starting to write this article, one of my favorite quotations explodes out of my brain. The somewhat peremptory words from the world-renowned author of *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* call me to order. As a scientist, I must put conceptual work in connection with reality. And—I admit—it is always a hard task.

I am an aquatic ecologist and I study plankton, the invisible ensemble of microscopic plants and animals that make the world go round. Yet, many of the world's multitudes are oblivious to plankton's existence. The sharp mismatch between my knowledge of this wonder of nature and the lack of awareness by the general public has driven me crazy since I was a young PhD student when I tried—not very successfully—to explain to my hundred-year-old grandma what I was actually studying.

We all belong to a multifaceted living system in which even the smallest components have a role in keeping it alive; a living system whose “health” is essential to our existence and persistence on Earth (e.g., Volk 2003). Unfortunately, in the present complex and deeply entangled societies, we



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(humans) are so profoundly engaged to our own businesses, interests, jobs, needs, and desires that our, say, “primordial ecological common-sense” is dramatically falling apart. Put simply, we (humans) are forgetting nature and our natural origin. For instance, we (scientists) look at plankton as part of the food web, not the food of OUR food. Yet, overcoming our own disengagement with our humanity could be what helps us bring nature to the masses.

## **The context: how to communicate science and to whom?**

Hope and despair alternate in our view of the future, in this beginning new millennium. The actual role nature plays in our societies is uncertain: does nature provide resources to industry or basic goods to humanity? In this context, ecological and economic concerns collide, leading to conflict. Clashing goals of non-governmental organization and trade