
MICHELE SOFISTI
nzatu
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1. Can you tell us about your personal and professional story?

I was born in a small alpine village in Italy, Bormio from parents originally from Merano and Bolzano in the Italian South Tyrol. My father's work brought us all over, but finally in the early 70s we settled in Parma. At that point, it was my parents and my two sisters, Alessandra and Giovanna and my grandmother . Professionally I have an unusual track record because I studied geology and initially worked as a geologist. But life's strange ways made me leave geology after seven years in underground construction to join Ferrari cars. I spent seven incredible years there too, becoming CEO of the German subsidiary of Ferrari. I then moved to Switzerland in the mid 90s to join the watch industry where I spent the longest part of my professional career . I became President, CEO of iconic Brands like Omega, Swatch, Gucci watches and Girard Perregaux, until I moved to opening my own Sofos Management for international strategy consulting. Over the last few years, I've been fully involved in biodiversity and wildlife conservation, circular economy and try to help mitigate climate change, building long term sustainable solutions like our Nzatu. I have always been immersed in nature, the four years as an advisor at the phenomenal National Geographic Society in Washington especially engrained nature even deeper. Today I also serve as an advisor with a few conservation NGOs.

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2. We know that you spent a majority of your career in the luxury fashion and automobiles industry. When and why did you set focus on biodiversity, climate and conservation?

I was always profoundly interested in natural events, and the state of the environment, reading scientific literature and studying natural systems. As CEO I pushed a few projects to protect the oceans, and forests. The difference is that today I'm fully into it, very passionate and full of energy to help create a positive impact. The transition came step by step and I feel that my understanding of the private sector, and NGOs can be of help in achieving results. I believe in saying that neither NGOs nor private sector engagement can unilaterally solve two global issues; biodiversity loss and climate change . Only joining forces with continuity and investment, creating a sustainable economy including native populations, can bring home the solution .

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3. What do you see as one of the major issues in wildlife and conservation organizations? How can such concerns be addressed?

Unfortunately, I believe that people's ignorance is the sickness to fight. If you bring a species like Rhinos to extinction because some humans think that its horns have therapeutic value, while it is only keratin like our nails, this is merely stupidity combined with criminality. There isn't just one solution, but many different ones. Education at an early age as we do with The Global Conservation Corps, one of Nzatu's partners in South Africa, rangers' work, the true modern heros who protect wildlife risking their lives, laws created by intelligent leaders (not many on the horizon), sustainable and regenerative agriculture to sufficiently feed millions of people. I learnt the lesson that if you are hungry and poor, you will not listen to wildlife conservation issues.

4. What has motivated you to become an Nzatu shareholder? How can a for-profit company support local communities, mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity, all at once?

I met Gwen Jones in Washington in 2022 at Resolve.ngo's annual meeting, where we both serve as advisors. Gwen told me about the project that she just started with her sister Denise. To me, it felt like touching a dream to be involved in an impactful project, solidly based on regenerative agriculture. I did not hesitate to join when Gwen asked me. I was also happy that Prithvi, a young Indian climate economist living in Bern accepted to join and finally my dear friend Andrea Chiesi , a passionate conservationist who brings to the project passion, experience and vision. And here we are. I believe also that the way to go is to be an impact company. This strategy is based on a small profit shared with the communities (the new economists' vision) for a long-term sustainable economy. As opposed to donations and philanthropy, which made history for the NGOs , but is an archaic model and is no more impactful. That's why joining forces will bring solutions. Our triple impact on communities, wildlife and climate comes through cooperation with the communities, conservation organizations and a scientific benchmark to move from. I'm a passionate believer in this model.

5. What can you share from your extensive corporate experiences that can be useful strategies for initiatives like Nzatu?

The private sector has a great responsibility. Even if things are moving in the right direction, there is a lack of investment continuity, always pointing fingers at reasons not to invest, aiming to create their own vision while it could be so easy just to select an existing project and join the effort. Too many excuses to stay away from engaging, prioritizing traditional marketing investments towards the usual known, influencers and stars. Therefore, on one side the investment that must be channelled to these important environmental projects, also to reach a new clientele – younger and motivated by impact projects, a new revenue potential . O the other, the continuity to give credibility to each project to avoid falling into the greenwashing category, as many projects seem to be today. Finally, and most importantly, the communication strengths of iconic brands. They can move millions of people's behavior and they can educate and create a positive narrative while doing business. Patagonia, for example.

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6. What do large corporate have to gain/learn from initiatives like Nzatu? Is there scope for disruptive change within these conglomerates or are they doing all they can?

As I mentioned, a project like NZATU offers a full ESG solution to be used to create impactful communications. It creates a positive visibility for any brand, even more if related to agriculture and food. It can create visible and traceable social impact in terms of gender equality, children's education, helping limit migration, and finally protect wildlife from extinction. I think that just one of these points is worth the effort for any brand. The endless, beautiful storytelling that can be generated has a value that is hard to measure, but it also has a very solid economic impact. The world economy depends on a balanced coexistence with the natural world. Large corporations have a fully responsibility towards this, to bring back the attitude to conserve instead of just taking, making and disposing.

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7. How do you see Nzatu's future growth and potential in terms of the commodities under it? Is Nzatu "Retail-Ready"?

I believe in a bright future for Nzatu simply because we have created a holistic ecosystem where all stakeholders are passionately involved. It could be the thousands of local farmers sharing our vision and improving their livelihoods, or the conservation organizations, or our Advisors, our families, our friends. We are touching their souls daily.

We have started with bee keeping, which is the base for everything in agriculture, and working on coffee. We will soon begin with various seaweed, moringa, essential oils and fruits. We are not yet retail ready, but we will be very soon, with same philosophy as today.

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8. You have steered mass international communication campaigns with entitles like NASA, the Olympics and the Grammy Awards, to name a few. How can such partnerships support in highlighting the core issues of biodiversity loss, climate change and indigenous communities?

I might not be right, but my personal vision is that any project on earth is entitled to get involved with biodiversity protection and climate change mitigation. These are the two global issues from which all the rest stems. We need the vision, energy and passion of any single entity to write a new story for the future of humanity. The Grammys or Olympics on a deserted planet does not make sense. A beautiful book by the Italian scientist Telmo Pievani ***The Earth After Us*** *points out the fact that our planet, with or without us, will survive as it did for the last few billions years. It is the people that need to change their path on the planet and become more conscious and nature centric instead of human centric.*

9. What do you think should be the role of international banks, private financiers, funds, and institutional investors in supporting regenerative agriculture models? Is there scope for them widen their horizons?

The world economy and therefore world finance will collapse if we advance as the linear economy of today. If we do not change this model into a circular, renewable, regenerative, and nature centric approach, there will not be any financial institutions or large corporations left. It is only a question of time. We are already seeing the devastating impact of climate change on fragile economies.

10. If you had the largest marketing & communications budget in the world, how would you use it?

Definitely on a global-scale communications campaign on biodiversity and climate change. I'd show the world the beauty of nature, the feeling of being immersed in it and the fantastic economic impact we can generate if we consider ourselves a part of it and not above it.


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