

Monopoly players

MINE/YOUR PROFIT

A sustainable economy does not come into existence if our leadership will voice the opinion that we are all dependent on each other's success.

by Lucas Simons

Why do we not seem to be able to live sustainably? That question fascinates me. Whether it is about large scale environmental pollution, climate change or social exploitation, it is all collateral damage of the way we act. And, even more fascinating, we think it's fairly normal. Even when the problems become overwhelming and life threatening for the human species, not much is being said about it. No one feels responsible, no one feels that the way he or she acts will make a difference.

How do you change that? This asks for a new kind of leadership.

Our leadership is comparable to playing Monopoly. That is winning at the cost of others. New leadership is not about playing and winning, but about changing the rules of the game so that everyone will profit. Take for instance my work field. That is the preservation of tropical, agricultural products. That sounds like a faraway show, but it is really about daily products: coffee, tea, cacao, palm oil, soy, sugar, cotton. The need for preservation lies in the expectation that we will share the earth in 2050 with 9 billion others – that is two billion more than there are at the moment.

Agriculture is (mainly in developing countries) already the largest consumer of drinking water, a large emitter of greenhouse gases, by far the most important causer of erosion, deforestation and the humongous decline of bio diversity. It is also an important cause of poverty, hunger, child labour, slavery and social exploitation. Why does our trade system fail so massively? There are three causes. First of all: if I don't do it, someone else will. Self-interest always goes before the common interest. Secondly: I want to get my bonus. Rather a short term result than one in the long term. Third: what does it really matter what I do? The distance between cause and effect is too big.

New rules of the game

These universal laws of system failure keep us trapped as well. If you are just a regular consumer, then you don't have to think. You have a lot of options and you are normal. If you want to consume in a sustainable way, you have to get information on all the products, you have less options, you have to pay more and you always have to explain why you do what you do. Is it still strange that so few people live sustainably? And even when you do, your influence is limited. These laws of failure are universally accepted. We all play Monopoly, where snatching is normal and is secretly admired. Losing, or not competing, is seen as a sign of weakness. I'd want our current schools, universities and MBA studies to stop delivering us more Monopoly players. But what is the solution then? That is the New Leadership, that starts with the idea that all nine billion people have a right to a bit of a decent life, that the future and success of one *is* dependent on the future and success of the other. That your prosperity is my prosperity. This has to be accompanied by a different

economical system, with new game rules, that rewards different behaviour. This may sound utopian, but there already are different forms of this kind of leadership. Like the social entrepreneurs that come up with new concepts that are against the mainstream, and that reward good behaviour. Like companies that explore new forms of cooperation to be able to bring sustainable products to the market – in a way that rewards suppliers when they produce responsibly so that the regular consumer only has responsible product options. Like business schools that try to escape the regulation of existing ratings, through which they are only able to deliver more of the same students. They adjust the ratings in such a way, that sustainability and responsible leadership are also taken into consideration.

I am convinced that these new norms and values will become normal. That we will look back to 2011 in twenty years and that we will have to explain to our kids how it was once normal and even admirable to only think about yourself. I truly believe in a future where success is measured in the surplus that you create financially as well as collectively. In that future, people will automatically act sustainably. Just because it is normal then.