

A new story

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After a wonderful summer, the autumn with another lockdown and additional new corona measures feels very disappointing. We are collectively getting tired of our Zoom meetings and working from home, while the only perspective offered is a vaccine as 'salvation' from this 'new normal'. But what role does each of us play in this story? Do we let ourselves get carried away by fear, the illusion of control and a short-term focus? Or, do we deliberately choose to work together creating new pathways into the unknown future, based on trust and cooperation?

The harvest...

Inevitably, after that wonderful sunny summer came autumn. The autumn period in which we normally harvest what we paid attention to in preceding months. After an isolated spring and the emergence of a new 'normal', we were allowed, step by step, the enjoyment of our familiar freedoms from the beginning of the summer. And with some adjustments here and there and feeling relieved with a receding pandemic, we veered back into the old 'normal'. And we wondered somewhat confused if we could really return to walking down the old ingrained paths that felt so safe and familiar. Or were we just fooling ourselves? After all, the end of the summer was filled with rumors about new measures to contain the virus, yet we danced on as if the Titanic had never hit an iceberg. And so, slowly but surely, a reality unfolded in which we allowed ourselves to be carried away on beautiful music in the arms of our loved ones, while the stories of immense ecological damage and social disruption revealed themselves to us ever more inevitably. The global corona crisis had laid bare major social problems, more visibly than ever before.

And so this autumn we collectively reaped the sour fruits of the freedom we had enjoyed during the summer. With the common realization that we had not learned a thing. According to the government this mostly concerned our individual behavior as citizens. Citizens who had allegedly adhered only minimally to the imposed measures. And according to citizens, our country's government had not learned enough since the first lockdown from the numerous experts that were invited to The Hague during the summer period, and that offered their various perspectives and potential solution angles.

Multiple realities

However, to distill a synthesis taking into account the multiple perspectives was a lot to ask. Perhaps too much to ask for in today's political arena? And doesn't this perhaps apply to most of us? Is the ability to look at and move from one perspective to the next, in a world that is complex and constantly changing, perhaps a quality that we have long failed to develop? Doesn't it create far too great a level of uncertainty and ambiguity to embrace those multiple perspectives, that variety of realities?

Uncertainty about the future. And also, uncertainty about each of our individual roles in that future.

Constant uncertainty and ambiguity

And yet, it was precisely this uncertainty about the future that made us ask questions and have conversations during the spring lockdown. Questions and dialogues about the extent to which we actually liked our individual and collective way of life. And the question to what extent our way of living is considered sustainable or not, after the global social, institutional and ecological imbalances had become so undeniably visible. Questions to which we often did not immediately have a complete, clear and unambiguous answer. As a result, a new shared story did not easily surface. Because it is

precisely this uncertainty, incompleteness and vagueness that is at odds with our need for clarity and control. Clarity and control that will not develop solutions instantly, but the mere idea of it provides at least a framework for action. Control that we know is an illusion ... and which we desire nevertheless.

Childlike confidence

What a difference when we look from our young children's perspective. A world in which the Sinterklaasjournaal plays an important role these weeks. A world in which trust, imagination and playful learning play a leading role. By embracing the new 'Sinterklaas normal', our children just take it for granted that no child will be allowed to wait for Sinterklaas 'live' when he arrives with his pieten. And also the fact that it is not clear where exactly in the Netherlands the steamer will dock, does not affect the expectation of the joy inherent with the tradition. This is not because our children do not miss the old 'Sinterklaas normal', but simply because they have enough resilience to adapt to new realities as they present themselves. And so the steamer, and our children, set their course to Zwalk. Where is Zwalk on the map and what does it look like? Nobody seems to know. Whether there is enough fuel to get to Zwalk? It doesn't look like it. And yet they all are on their way. On the journey to Zwalk. With the full confidence that along the way they will create the solutions needed to get there.

Anchor, dialogue & connection

Where our children are fully embracing the uncertainty, we are trying to find new anchors. On the one hand, because it is slowly dawning on us that there is a good chance that the 'new normal' will permanently replace parts of the 'old normal'. For many of us this realization will trigger yet again a feelings of loss and mourning. On the other hand, we are looking for grip because a clear and above all enticing and coherent future perspective is still largely absent. Together this fuels our feelings of uncertainty. And so it seems essential that we continue to ask questions and enter into a dialogue about the potential outcomes. After all, with lasting and increasing feelings of uncertainty, the chance of polarization within our societies also increases. Polarization that can be channeled by listening to each other and engaging in dialogue. Dialogues about our doubts, our question marks and our different perspectives on the world around us. Unfortunately, in a society where manipulability is the standard, uncertainty and not knowing is often masked instead of shared. By masking what is really going on underneath the surface, we deprive ourselves and each other, of the chance to truly connect. Where openness, transparency and authenticity creates trust and connection, the lack of it results in the opposite. And it is precisely trust and connection that are so desperately needed to be able to deal with the uncertain future together.

Short-term focus and long-term perspective

Where the function of perspective in the art of drawing is to provide a basis for creating the right proportions between the different parts of the final drawing, the lack of future perspective today deprives us of the view of the whole picture. Our human tendency to focus on individual parts is understandable and learned rather than innate. And at the same time it can be dangerous. Our short-term focus on arguments about whether/not/which measures to contain the coronavirus, each from the perspective of our own expertise, ultimately distracts more and more from conducting the dialogues that are necessary to prevent aggravation of the already existing systemic flaws within our societal structures. Can we look beyond the virus? Although the corona crisis is a very serious issue, it is mainly a wake-up call that has rudely awoken us from a (too) long-cherished dream. A dream about a neo-liberal system in which manipulability, individualism, materialism and control played the leading part. That dream is turning out more and more to be a nightmare for many people worldwide as it leaves a solid trail of destruction, both socially and ecologically. With a continued dominance of the corona virus in the news and leaning on a government that emphasizes control, lockdowns, corona roadmaps, a corona emergency law and vaccines, we seem to be losing focus on the matter that urgently needs our attention: our society in the long-term.

From dreaming to doing

Let us wake up now and search together for new anchors, for principles and values that offer a sustainable basis for our shared future. From higher up, a long-term coherent future perspective is not yet being offered. And with that, the writing of a new collective story seems to have come to a standstill. Unless we keep writing that story. Together. Let's write and work on a story that offers hope and guidance. Because the individual puzzle pieces that each of us has to offer can together form a beautiful dot or line on the horizon. A dot or line on the horizon for so many entrepreneurs who, after maximum effort and creativity, are now still heading for bankruptcy. It can offer hope and new perspective for citizens suffering from burnout, loneliness, poverty, depression, unhealthy lifestyles and/or living environments and delay in medical treatments. This seems incredibly essential and needed now that so many institutions are unable to provide the help that is needed. Let's outline perspectives and offer practical tools to organizations that are wondering how they can play a meaningful part in society, so that they can follow the good example that many are already giving.

Together towards Zwalk

Reports from scientific committees about what works and future visions for specific sectors are abundantly available. Do we now dare to bring these together? And will we now start using these as the basis for the conversations about which systems and institutions can be carefully dismantled, which ones need to be transformed and which new parts we are going to build together? Do we dare to listen to each other, to search for answers together and to sketch a new outline of the future, step by step? So that we can start living it, each of us with his own specific contribution. By paying attention to lonely people in your community, by listening to your children's ideas so that they can play a part in shaping their future, or by ordering your groceries in reusable jars to help reduce packaging waste. Or take a radical look at your business model to make sustainability an integral part of your business. All these individual steps are important, and together they allow for a new future to start taking shape. A future perspective that includes sustainable solutions, devised by and for the benefit of all of us. A perspective that offers guidance on where and how to start. Because we create the future together. Today. Tomorrow. And each new day. Based on the hope and confidence that together we will gradually find the pieces of the puzzle that forms this bright future in which we take good care of each other and the earth. Let the childlike confidence of our children in Sinterklaas's search for Zwalk be contagious and offer us hope. Hope that binds us together and encourages us to start our journey toward the future. A future that will inevitably present itself. Are you joining the journey? To what is undoubtedly a beautiful place.