

Beyond populism

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Far-right populism is on the rise in many European countries. The ecological problems we face are being pushed aside, also in the Netherlands. Here, four populist Dutch claims are analysed. With what we use from our planet's natural resources, we've been demanding more than the planet can provide worldwide since 1970. Some figures.

By 2050 the total man-made mass (asphalt, glass, plastic, concrete, etc.) will be double the planetary organic mass. Of the nine planetary boundaries as determined by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, one is safe (Ozone), four have been crossed, three almost crossed and one has not yet been established. The Earth Overshoot day was this year July 28 (then we had used as many resources worldwide as the planet can regenerate in 1 year, in the Netherlands it was much earlier: April 12 (if everyone in the world lived like the average Dutch person). The Dutch Natural Capital Day (if only every Dutch person had to do with the Dutch Bio-capacity) was already on 19 February. The figures are comparable for many other 'developed' countries in Europe. Nice numbers to keep next to a number of populist statements.

1. The Netherlands for the Dutch.

Raw materials that we convert into economics are extracted from all over the world. For more than 10 of the 12 months we have to feed ourselves, our factories and all our activities/entertainment with ecological sources outside the Netherlands (Natural Capital Day 19 February). The whole world for the Dutch!

2. The 'ordinary' Dutch person is entitled to his prosperity.

Why should the "average" Dutch person be entitled to more prosperity than all other world citizens? Already on April 12 (after 3 months and 12 days) we have used all the resources that the planet can reproduce in 12 months for that 'ordinary luxury'. Since the entire world has exhausted the planet for a year on July 28 (so after almost 6 months), we take much more than the average world citizen. We therefore also have a significantly larger share in pollution, reduction of biodiversity and climate change, partly due to the conversion of organic material into man-made material. Are we going to pay the bills for that as "ordinary" Dutch people?

3. The Netherlands is full, no more refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees knock on our borders, for example because their world has been disrupted by drought, war (often over mineral resources for "our" energy needs), in which we therefore have an above-average share (see 2). Keeping the Netherlands for the Dutch means that we can live here exactly 1 month and 19 days as we do now. The rest of the year we would have to hunt and flee ourselves.

4. Our national level of education is superior.

Almost half of the Dutch population between the ages of 25 and 65 is highly educated. With so many compatriots learning to see connections, it's hard to understand why we blame the threat to our own excess lifestyles on emerging economies (formerly third world countries) that can no longer or won't satisfy our increasingly derailed need for wealth.

Prosperity and well-being are very different things. If there's one culture that's lost sight of that, it's ours. If things can no longer be the way they used to be, the question must be: How is that possible? And with every activity we undertake – whether traditional or innovative – we have to ask ourselves: What are we not going to do anymore? Now we are using more and more energy and are producing more and more junk, worldwide. So much so that, despite there being almost 8 billion people on the planet, we are faced with labour shortages in many sectors. Maybe we can close sectors, just stop. Populists play with feelings of being preserved, or even back to the stage where most of us were unaware of the heist we were committing on our planet (and the developing world). We thought the trees grew up to the sky. There is one question that we have to ask ourselves more and more often: what are we not going to do anymore?