

More is never enough!

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Last weekend I replaced the shower thermostat tap with a new one. The ceramic elements had broken, causing the tap to leak. Soaking in a vinegar bath did not help anymore. I often get into pondering when performing these kinds of chores. The set that I replaced was "sustainable"; made of much heavier metal and three times as expensive as the new set. But replacing only the interior of the "sustainable" tap - the ceramic disks - is twice as expensive as a new but less durable set. While I throw all discarded "sustainable" elements of top quality into the waste container, I realize that in this case sustainable means only more waste.

In our house, the discussion about reducing our ecological footprint is a recurring topic every day. This weekend, for example, my wife switched completely to soap and shampoo that was not packed in plastic bottles. At school my youngest son works on his profile document about the environmental damage that the large-scale meat consumption entails. For example, more conscious meat consumption helps, as promoted by the meat-free days action of the former Beatle Paul McCartney: per capita about 20% less meat is eaten than 10 years ago. However, 10% more animals are slaughtered for meat consumption: if they eat less meat, everyone wants those tasty pieces, which are unfortunately restricted per animal. My son has become a vegetarian.

Last Thursday, Saxion University had rented a large tent at "the biggest knowledge festival in the Netherlands". Eight Saxion professors and their students gave lectures on smart technology. Between the lectures, I walked across the festival site. What a profusion! Performances in every nook and cranny. On the big stages, the futurologists stood serving their well-paid lectures (€8,000 each) with lots of hot air. And again I was fooled by their window dressing and walked into a tent with a "head act". And again a completely inconsistent story, where the public was visibly served. The message: "We really have to change, because whether we like it or not, the artificial intelligence will change the world more than ever before". And he preaches what we should do, for he knows because he writes a bestseller every year! Fallacies all around.

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One refrain characterizes the knowledge festival in all its aspects: more is better than enough. In the Saxion-tent, my colleagues lectured with heart and soul about their real research. Of course, they did not get the attention that the "known from television" personalities got with their "window dressing". People had paid 200 euros per ticket to admire the biggest screamers, so they can say at another birthday party that they've seen to the star alive.

Biologically, human is a scarcity-driven specie, eating as much as possible because it's uncertain when there'll be food again. From a cultural point of view, this scarcity-driven basis has also been extended to products other than food: we are collectors. Rationally we know we should use less in order to achieve a sustainable future. But if we buy more sustainable items and also replace them with the next fashion wave, sustainability only follows the same chorus: more is better than enough. And then this only accelerates our downfall, just like in the mentioned increase in meat production and the sustainable shower tap. But in a very small corner of the festival, very quiet, there was a "Tiny houses" stand. I stood there for a while. Surely it deserved much more attention. I suggested that the Tiny Houses people should invite a new time guru next time, known from television and a book every year. They replied they couldn't afford the fee!

Finally, I would like to return to the only woman who is currently giving lectures on popular venues, and not only in the Netherlands, but around the world: Kate Raworth. Economist and professor at Oxford, specializing in new business models that have to make our future truly sustainable. My hope is based on her!