

Get ready for a smart world

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The world is changing. While we are concerned about which party we have to vote for, we do not realize that not eligible "parties" increasingly determine what we do most: the high tech multinationals. In fact, we organize our education in such a way that we can adapt to their products optimally. From an early age we teach our pupils to work with the products of manufacturers like Microsoft, Google, Apple, Samsung, and Facebook. In their slogans they often claim that they shape and produce our future. And indeed, they do! Even in (higher) education, too easily "smart" is understood as being well adapted to the products of the tech giants. And because of globalization, these multinationals do have the politicians in their power, including those that we vote for. What's up with that?

To start with the latter, if a large technology multinational (or bank) doesn't like the choices of politicians, it can move its head office or the production lines to a country where the political climate is perceived as more favourable. The ambitions of multinationals are literally and figuratively limitless. Not only are they the secular rulers who marginalize democracy, they also leave behind traces of social consequences (loss of employment, unemployment) if they leave a region, putting the burden on the shoulders of the local societies and populations. Politicians can never do it well. They get the blame if a large company moves its business to another country; they should have created a better political climate. But if a company is "bribed" to stay by adapting the regulations, it is also their fault, because they do not limit the power of these multinationals.

In Western Europe, our ambition is to be a knowledge economy. That is why we want to keep our top talents in the region. But top engineers, technicians and economists easily disappear with the multinationals (high tech, banks); they follow the multinationals who are guided by their opportunistic pursuit of the most favourable political climate. Closing the borders (Brexit, Nexit) is a possibility, at the risk of putting the country out of business economically. Nevertheless, politicians remain credible and stand up for democracy and against the unrestrained power of the multinationals.

Investing in art, culture, education, healthcare and construction

In my opinion, a simpler solution is available: investing both in art and culture, and even more in education, healthcare and construction. Since time immemorial, art has been the conscience of generations. Although art forms are among the first signs of human civilization, art as a reflection on human action is so very important especially now. It holds a mirror to society and asks questions. Why do we do what we do? Why don't we see that using more technology doesn't automatically make us happier? Art teaches us that sometimes less is more.

Investing in education, healthcare and construction is investing in local economy and society. At least, if education perceives "get ready for a smart world" (the credo of Saxion University) as more than an uncritical adaptation to the latest products of the high-tech multinationals. Getting ready for a smart world should be a social enterprise, with art, reflection and meaning in the heart of society, side by side with google and social health care. We should care for each other. There are also many top talents in the care sector, tied to local communities, for example in hospitals, nursing homes and other care centers. That's how to keep top talents in the region.

Anyway, ICT-skills are often mentioned as one of the main objectives of modern education. However, this isn't as obvious as it sounds. Unless ICT skills are equal to learning to recognize and deal with the social and psychological consequences of an often uncritical acceptance of the dogma technology is good. Take note, "technology" and "future" are often mentioned in advertisements in one breath. Getting ready for a smart World is more than a technical matter. In fact, it is primarily a social matter. Again, in their marketing activities tech multinationals often state that technology is the future. Of course, technology has brought great benefits in addition to potential threats. But why do even educational institutions and universities seem to be so uncritical in strengthening the powers of the most powerful?