

## Let us dare to dream!

She got on the train at Florival. The ticket inspector's attitude made me sit up. He was so patient; waiting for this person to board the train. Then I understood. The young woman was blind. She let her dog board first so as to guide her inside. I offered them my seat because there was more room there and went to sit on the other side of the aisle. As the train was winding along the Dyle valley, with lakes to the left and the forest to the right, the lady was radiating a beautiful energy. I decided to cross the aisle again to sit down opposite her and start off a conversation.

We talked about her dog, a golden retriever, brimming with health. I asked about how the dog was trained and what was her role in this. After a year of socialization in a family, the dog is further trained by a specialized dog handler for 9 months. Then the dog's mistress gets involved. In point of fact, she actually only had two half-weeks of training and mostly learned how to handle the dog on the job.

Above all, she told me it was important to establish with the dog that she was the boss. The dog needed to know that when he was wearing the guide's harness, there was some serious business to be done!

Since then, the dog has never let his mistress down... Oh yes, she tells me with a smile, the poor beast finds it difficult to estimate my height. One day he passed under an automatic barrier which hit me straight in my chest!

I then asked her: "Is it difficult to be guided by a dog?" She replied: "No, the technique is simple and easy to master. The hardest thing however is to completely trust your guide: to stop if he stops even when you don't perceive any danger; or to follow his guidance and continue your journey in the middle of hubbub and apparent commotion."

We arrived in Leuven, the last stop. Forthrightly she made her way towards the station's exit. The young woman sped off to give her music classes for the visually impaired.

If trusting in one's dog opens up so many possibilities, how many more horizons open up when humans trust each other?

You may think, "Does this guy come from Mars? Where was he in early January when the bloody events in Paris occurred after so many horrors perpetrated in so many other countries? In the light of these events, wouldn't it be better to put your trust in one's dog rather than fellow man? »

Indeed, in whom shall we trust? The media upping their ratings through the cultivation of our fears? The political world thriving on difference and competition where common sense calls for unity and cooperation? The religious world that all too often harnesses our spirituality instead of nurturing it? Experts who are only too happy to get out of their narrow field of expertise to make recommendations less based on facts than the ideology of the moment?

Yet on January 10 and 11, something happened in France, in Europe and beyond. The deepest of our values had come under attack: we silently stood and marched. And for a moment we knew that we

were brothers and sisters. Will January 11, 2015 be remembered as a passing glimmer in the night, or rather will it be remembered as the day when citizens took control over their destiny?

While politicians and experts took over the media to discuss the follow-up to January 11, I remembered a conversation with Ali, our postman in Grez-Doiceau, my village of Walloon Brabant in Belgium. As a demographer at the Niger Ministry of Planning, he had participated in the national program to reduce poverty. Then he made "the mistake" to carry out a census of slavery throughout Niger. A Belgian friend spirited him out of jail and helped him to get political asylum. In an interview for our village's newspaper, I asked him to look at our society with the eyes of an anthropologist. One of his statements comes to mind these days: "You Belgian people tend to look to the administration to solving any problem, where we would rather turn to our neighbor or family member for help. »

It is totally normal to look to our government and to our political authorities to do their part to ensure our safety. For sure they have made great efforts to reassure us. But deep down, do we really feel so reassured? Do we still dare to have dreams for the future, our future? Do we ask ourselves what we can do, we as citizens, we as members of the academic staff, we as health care workers and as future managers of the French administration? Who else, other than all of us, can shape a world to meet our deepest aspirations for ourselves and for future generations?

Our world is undergoing profound changes. In entire sectors of our economies, investments generate near-zero marginal costs, thus rendering the accumulation of capital impossible, while nevertheless paving the way for new businesses based not on competition, but on collaboration. Local currencies support new forms of collaboration between citizens and enterprises. In all sectors of the private and public economy, decision makers have decided to move forward. Laurence Vanhée supported by her Director of Social Affairs at the Belgian Federal Public Service reorganized the entire administration into autonomous teams and replaced individual controls based on mistrust by group contracts based on trust. When in France, Jean-François Zobrist took over the management of FAVI, a foundry that produces gearbox parts among other items, he removed all central departments and organized workshop production teams per customer. What is the slogan of FAVI? The company that believes that man is good! In the Netherlands, when home care nurse Jos De Blok decided that he had enough of stupid performance standards that prevented him from doing his job properly, he decided in 2006 to start his own non-profit company, Buurtzorg. It relies on teams of 12 nurses who complete all technical and management tasks. Eight years later, Buurtzorg has 7000 employees and Jos De Blok still has not implemented a central management structure ... In all three cases, as in so many others, the results are the same: dramatic cost reduction, increases in quality and happiness at work. Laurence Vanhée has coined a new title for the HR director, the h@ppyculteur<sup>1</sup> ... At the center of each of these experiments, we can find someone putting a stop to outdated control practices and establishing a culture of trust.

Too good to be true? What has happened to the sacrosanct law of the market, which would have us believe that man is an autonomous entity seeking his own interest? This law might, be it somewhat imperfectly, explain how markets operate, but it cannot explain life. For man is fundamentally related to others and with nature. Contrary to popular belief, a body of evidence from multiple disciplines shows that not selfishness but disinterested altruism characterizes humankind.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a play on words. Apiculteur in French = beekeeper

Within Constellation we learned that all over the world individuals and communities have similar deep aspirations. (I will come back to this point.) Our association was born ten years ago to stimulate and connect people who mobilize their own resources to respond locally to the AIDS challenge. But gradually, we were invited to stimulate local responses in relation to other issues: malaria, diabetes, vaccination resistance, health democracy in Gafsa in southern Tunisia, but also the inclusion of political asylum seekers in Belgium, the rebirth of Faubourg, a neighborhood of Vilvoorde, or the reappropriation of politics by the citizens of Grez-Doiceau, Belgium.

The results are convincing and sustainable: self-measured progress on AIDS, reduced mortality and morbidity due to malaria, dramatic increase in the number of oral polio vaccinations in North Katanga, a regional health strategy in Gafsa and a team to implement it, reduction of violence in the Beho asylum seekers center, and a real feeling of collective revival by the inhabitants of Faubourg.

In all these cases, citizens made issues their own, first seeing what they could do for themselves with their own resources before considering the mobilization of additional resources from beyond their immediate environment. They did not look to the administration, donors and experts to provide solutions. They invited them to be part of their own actions.

The secret of our approach lies in the change of outlook. We refrain from the endless analysis of what has gone wrong. We do not come in with expert grids, let alone preachers' moral precepts. We put to rest somehow our analytical mind and judgments and open our mind and soul to appreciation, the direct apprehension of what is. We act as learners. Because we seek to learn, we listen to others and are attentive to the resonance with our own experiences. Our questions seek to gain better understanding of others' experience, in order to transfer what we learn to other contexts. This is what we call SALT: Stimulate, Appreciate, Listen, Transfer. In a book, "What makes us human?" I have tried to describe the transformation which occurs when we change our outlook on ourselves and on others.

The January events shocked us. They served as a warning signal of a deep crisis in a world that undergoing profound change. Who says crisis, says choice. Either we choose not to hear the signal and continue our lives as before, as long as it lasts. Either we reconnect with our deepest aspirations and act to achieve them.

Before the end of March, Constellation will invite the visitors to its website to subscribe to the Universal Declaration on the Right to Dream. I will read it now. [reading]

### **Universal Declaration on the Right to Dream**

*Every person and every human community is able to generate its own vision of the future and has the essential resources to realize it.*

To call upon these resources we change our perception of ourselves and others:

- We recognize the fundamental goodness of all human beings, and thus overcome our fears and our prejudice to address the roots of exclusion
- We seek neither saints nor sinners, but appreciate what is good and beautiful in every person
- Between the money and the person we choose the person

- We cultivate our relationships in such a way that all human beings develop and make use of their full potential
- We regularly review our actions and use our experience to adapt them
- We actively search for knowledge that enhances our autonomy
- We create the space that allows us to listen to ourselves and others
- We mobilize our own energies and share them with others
- We organize ourselves to serve our vision and define our own criteria of progress.

*Therefore we, temporary residents of Planet Earth, **declare**, in union with our ancestors and our descendants, **our right to create our shared vision for the future and to implement actions to realize it.***

This statement is a living text. As signatories, we will use it as a rallying point for joint action and for the induction of common principles emerging from our actions.

We make no demands to exercise our right to dream. We unite to create a shared vision throughout our living spaces, neighborhoods, villages, associations, places of work, worship and leisure.

Shall we act together now?

Jean-Louis Lamboray

February 4, 2015

## References

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