

We should not go
back to normal,
because normal
was the problem

Hope in time of crisis

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Dreaming of a better future through new economic systems

Master thesis
Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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I hope this thesis will inspire you about the opportunities we DO have to do business more sustainable and move towards a better future, with respect for our Mother Earth.

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Prologue

It was the year 2015 when I finished my bachelor's degree in Small Business & Retail Management. For four and a half years I had been educated to be an entrepreneur myself. It resulted in the classic case of 'I have finished studying something I do not feel enthusiastic about anymore, now what?' I do feel passionate about economics and I really feel connected to small businesses, but for me, there was still something missing during those four and a half years. I experienced those years as very monotonous and everything was looked upon from just one perspective: I never had to deal with sustainability or Corporate Social Responsibility. How is that possible if I was supposed to be educated to be an entrepreneur? My interest in sustainability grew and eventually I decided to do a master's degree in this direction. Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship has taught me the value of really listening, digging deeper and seeing things from a different point of view. Now, five years later, the result of that lies here before you. An anthropological research into the relationship between hope and choosing a sustainable economic system. I believe that it is of importance not to approach the economy from a single perspective anymore. We have lost respect for the earth because the relationship between human and nature has been disturbed. As a result, we have been living in climate change for some time now, which is really turning into a crisis we have never seen before. With the opportunities that already exist and innovations that are being developed, we are able to change this. I am hoping for a better future because of the companies I have spoken with, who have shown me that sustainable entrepreneurship is able to change the current Linear Economy.

Introduction

The rise of economics within anthropology can be traced back to the eighteenth century during the expansion of the European colonial population. In this period the "other" forms of economy were documented during the expeditions. However, it was only around the nineteenth century that standards were set for economic research within anthropology. Research into the ceremonial exchange systems of "tribal" economies stood central here (Hann 2017, 1). The term "primitive economy" was replaced around 1920 by "economic anthropology" (Hann 2017, 2). The ethnographic tool used by anthropology offers the opportunity to examine how economic systems are constructed and the associated processes that ensure that the one system predominates. It also allows us to examine how some undermine or bypass these dominant systems. It helps us understand the daily reality of the emergence of these systems (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 12).

All economic activities take place in a specific socio-cultural context (Hann 2017, 2). Ethnographic research plays a crucial role in this because it allows us to deal with the fact that these systems are detachable, abstract objects, able to circulate across geographical, social and cultural landscapes. At the same time they only generate power as concrete and unique manifestations of historical, social and cultural realities (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 12). Anthropology conceptualizes the economy as consisting out of processes that are involved in life in different ways, in a broad sense, and with emphasis on the effort as the goal to sustain life. But making and sustaining that life is as much about collaboration as it is about being part of a collective that gives meaning to life. What makes it "worthwhile"? And what if it is not possible to sustain life because of, for example, a crisis affecting the future? (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 5-6).

In 1980 our world changed forever.¹ It was then that Reagan and Thatcher came to power and the neoliberal principles of our current Linear Economic system was created to dominate the world economics (Harvey 2007, 1-2). Neoliberalism is often punt in relation to deregulation, private property, trade and financial freedom and the reduction of the state's role in the economy (Adamam and Madra 2014, 32). Adamam and Madra (2014, 30) state that we should understand neoliberalism as economization, because only then it covers the project it is of reshaping the lives and livelihoods through this economic framework and the risks that come

¹ The following part may correspond to Veldhoven, Research proposal, 2020

with it of deepening economic and climate crises. Economization is used as a term to describe processes that economically shape the behaviour, organisations, institutions and objects in a society (Çalışkan & Callon 2009, 370). The economization of our society through neoliberalism caused us to be in crisis after crisis (financial, environmental.) with on ongoing focus on GDP (gross domestic product) growth. Ever since 1980, neoliberalism dominated and brought destruction (Raworth 2017, 220). For example: privatization of property has led to exclusion and overexploitation, if we want to go on with using the commons in this way, the global economy will need 1.4 times the earth's capacity (Adamam and Madra 2014, 32).

More than a decade before this happened Hardin (1968) wrote about a tragedy that humanity would face regarding the earth's natural resources, The tragedy of the commons. He stated that because of exponential growth in our population, the common natural resources of the earth would steadily decrease and this would quickly cause problems regarding the finite natural resources the earth provides us with (Hardin 1968, 1243). Today, humanity is living far beyond the earth's boundaries: overconsuming the commons, causing them to be unable to renew, causing climate change (Raworth 2012, 6). It looks like Hardin's predictions have come true. Besides the current problem we face with The tragedy of the commons, more than half of humanity is living below humanitarian boundaries (Raworth 2012, 6).

The twenty-first century is based on analytical frameworks and political structures (neoliberalism) designed for and in a different era when waves of growth and globalization were desired. This Linear Economy is not suited to the economic reality of the post-millennial world (Fischer 2019 160). Right now we are still living in an economic system that has been going from financial to financial crisis and has caused the world to find itself in a climate crisis as well (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 7). "Crisis" refers to structural processes generally understood to be beyond the control of people but simultaneously expressing people's breach of confidence in the elements that provided relative systemic stability and reasonable expectations for the future (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4).

When we talk about economy, we are projecting in the future. The economic actions undertaken now have a clear temporal orientation towards the future based on expectations formed by past experiences and their idealization (e.g. the statement "Everything used to be better") (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 10). The anthropological view is well placed to study orientations to the future in everyday life. The focus on the present and the future and at the same time keeping an eye on the past, is necessary and at the base of the origins of the anthropological discipline (Posega 2018).

Despite ‘all the wrong’ that seems to happen to our planet because of neoliberal economic processes, there can be a better future. Bryant and Knight (2019, 16) mention that one orientation to the future in everyday life, as a way to analyse and give meaning to the future, is the notion of hope. Hope is about the possibility of projecting life into the future (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4-5). It is the affective result of trying to bring particular “otherwises” into actuality, in the case of this thesis, sustainable economic systems (Bryant & Knight 2019, 134).

Fischer (2019, 160) and Raworth (2017) state the time has come to rethink the antiquated current linear system. Kate Raworth (2012 & 2017) states that we need a new compass for the twenty-first century if we want a sustainable economy that lasts. This research will focus on three sustainable economic systems:

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** can be understood as different things, but in the end it is all about taking responsibility for society as a company through this system. It is an integral vision of a company's core activities (MVO Nederland 2020).
- **The Doughnut Economy**, with the outside representing the boundary of our planet earth and its natural resources and the whole in the middle representing the people who live below poverty lines. The space in between, the Doughnut, is an inclusive economy that is able to thrive within those boundaries (Raworth 2017).
- **Circular Economy**, which is about using less or no raw materials and looking for a sustainable alternative, to extend the lifespan of appliances and to repair broken items (MVO Nederland 2020).

According to Fischer (2019, 162) anthropology is a unique way of offering visions on other possible ways of organising economic and political systems. Ethnography, in particular, plays a crucial role in this, because ethnographic research can help bring a future into view that cannot be drawn from the present. This particular research will focus on hope in times of crisis, how uncertainties about the future shape the choices sustainable companies make today. Mainly focussed on MVO Nederland and two affiliated partners (companies within their network), this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

How are notions of hope and sustainable economic systems informed and constructed by perceptions of the future among companies affiliated with MVO Nederland during times of crisis?

In this thesis I will explore how companies affiliated with MVO Nederland do business sustainably and why they choose sustainable economic systems, in order to illustrate the connection with having hope for a better future. This thesis will work with the relatively new anthropology of the future (Bryant & Knight 2019) and a history of the current Linear Economy.

Methodology & operationalization

In order to get access into companies that work with sustainable economic systems, I started a job at the organization MVO Nederland (I will go into more detail on the research location in the following paragraph). MVO Nederland was what O'Reilly (2012, 114) would conceptualize as a gatekeeper. Because MVO Nederland serves as a platform for sustainable companies in the Netherlands, the organization was my key informant, enabling me access to case companies for this research from their database. Working at MVO Nederland and gaining access to two case companies let me to conduct nine semi-structured interviews within MVO Nederland and employees working at the sustainable case companies. A list of the respondents, including their function, whom these semi-structured interviews were conducted with can be found in the appendix. They all have been anonymized to respect their privacy (O'Reilly 2012).

Alongside semi-structured interviews, I made use of participant observation. Participant observation is a method “through which one takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1). Being present at MVO Nederland gave me insights on who they are and a more in depth understanding of their perceptions on sustainable economic systems and the new economy they believe in. Besides that, the job has given me the opportunity to build rapport (O'Reilly 2012).

Throughout my field research I documented what I heard, saw and experienced on a daily basis (O'Reilly 2012, 101). The most used method for me ended up to be writing down my field notes in my field diary during the three months of fieldwork. Every day that I went to work at MVO Nederland I took a note book with me. O'Reilly (2012, 102) states that during ethnographic research and participant observation, you will collect a lot of notes. This is why it is so important to handle them carefully: the goal is to ultimately collect all the information and data that is likely to be relevant. As O'Reilly (2012, 102) mentions, it is also about capturing the first impressions because these will move to insider sensitives. For me this was a moment

to be reflective of the day and enabled me to stand back, it was where the analysis began (O'Reilly 2012, 104).

I used the triangulation of methods to improve the reliability of my data: the semi-structured interviews are used to compliment the participant observation undertaken in this research (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 127). Because of my position as an employee at MVO Nederland, I was also able to obtain ethnographic information in the way of informal conversations. Economic anthropology and anthropology of the future play an role in this thesis because of the subjects of neoliberalism, economization, hope and the future. Conducting fieldwork within companies,

Corona

Conducting three months of fieldwork at MVO Nederland and the two case companies was the original idea for this research. The original plan was to conduct all the semi-structured interviews at MVO Nederland and the case study companies physically, but because of corona most of them were taken online through Teams. Nonetheless the interviews provided in depth answers about how these participants view and perceive subjects of my research and are also a way to compliment the theory. Corona caused a change of direction in my research methods. From being there at MVO Nederland and wanting to visit the case study companies multiple times, we were worldwide forced to work from home because of the pandemic. Being there at MVO Nederland eventually took place online and visits to the case study companies resulted in semi-structured interviews only. Chapter four sheds light on this period during my research and the effects of the pandemic I witnessed during participant observation. By means of text analysis (which can function as a window into human experience (Bernard & Ryan 1998, 595)), data from semi-structured interviews and fieldnotes, the chapter takes you through a unique time for our economy and the possibilities that the corona crisis offers for rethinking the current economic system.

Research locations & participants

The organisation name of MVO Nederland can be translated to Corporate Social Responsibility, but through this research I stick to the name MVO Nederland. MVO Nederland believes in a new economy that is circular and inclusive, with fair supply chains (MVO Nederland 2020). They states that companies in the new economy should not only be driven by financial values, but also by those values that have a positive impact on people and the environment. Many

entrepreneurs are already aware of this, but according to MVO Nederland, many more steps can be taken. They see this new economy as a future-proof economy in which entrepreneurs can continue to do business. To make this possible, they look at the full impact that companies have on society (MVO Nederland 2020). I chose for this research location because MVO Nederland is the platform for sustainable companies (and companies who want to become more sustainable) in The Netherlands, at the moment there are 2000 companies (partners) affiliated with MVO Nederland. On the other side, MVO Nederland works closely together with the Dutch politics through lobbying for a sustainable economy (MVO Nederland 2020). Besides my participant observation at MVO Nederland, I conducted research at two case study companies within the textile and food & agri network:

- **MUD Jeans:** the Dutch company MUD Jeans was founded in 2013. The founder, Bert, of the company had more than 30 years of experience in the fashion industry and came to realize how unsustainable and unfair this industry was and still is. Their name comes from the fact that mud is a mixture of water and soil, silt and clay and forms after the combination with water. It is a product of nature that plays an important role in the earth's ecosystem and not to forget, it can be recycled eternally (Mud Jeans 2020).
- **Eosta:** in 1990 the company was founded by CEO Volkert. The name Eosta is deduced from the Greek word "Eos", the goddess of dawn. The idea of the sunrise symbolises how the company finds its way every day by connecting two worlds: that of social idealism and that of commercial realism. Twenty-five years later, the company represents more than a thousand organic and biodynamic growers on six continents, with sales throughout Europe and far beyond (Eosta 2020).

Ethics & reflection

The different roles of employee and conducting participant observation at MVO Nederland tested my role in the field. The ethical challenges were there sometimes and sometimes it was also difficult to draw the line between my work and conducting research. At MVO Nederland I made it clear from the time of the application process what I wanted to do and from that moment on the organization informed consent. The concept of informed consent is that "people have the right to freely choose whether to participate in a research project or not" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 215). As mentioned before, the respondents have been anonymized. However, this fundamental principle of ethnographic research does not enclose the locations of research, because the participants stated that this would not be necessary.

Outline

Through the first chapter I elaborate on the research location and participants because they play an important role. They are the embodiment of companies that have chosen a sustainable economic system. The research subject of this thesis is inevitably connected to the perception of businesses and doing business in a sustainable way. Therefore, it is of importance to gain an in depth insight into who they are and what they do. Knowing what they stand for as a company and why they have opted for a sustainable economic system will provide a realistic picture of the economic field in which they find themselves.

The second chapter, will give the reader more knowledge of what can be understood as an sustainable economic system, what corporate social responsibility is and how all of this is connected to crisis. In order to move forward to the subject of hope and its relation with sustainable economic systems in the third chapter, it is important to analyse what we can understand as sustainable economic systems first. But to come here, the chapter will start providing some insight on the neoliberal history and economization of the current Linear Economy which caused The tragedy of the commons.

Chapter three covers the other main subjects of this thesis: anthropology of the future and hope. This chapter will move towards an orientation of hope for the future to help us make further sense of the role the future plays in shaping the sustainable choices companies make today. Due to specific situations in the present because of the past, like climate crisis, we orient ourselves for a better future through hope (Bryant & Knight 2019).

And fourth, you can find the chapter on the corona pandemic which had quite an impact on this thesis and shows us a lot more about the connection between crisis and choosing sustainability than people might think on beforehand. The corona pandemic affected our economies worldwide, which led to many discussions about the amounts of possible economic support packages and the green conditions that should or should not be attached to them. In addition, many sustainable entrepreneurs and scientists argue that we should not want to go back to 'normal', because that is what would have put us in this situation in first place. I will explain why we need to re-interpret the economy by going green supported through my own data.

The where and the who

Through this chapter I would like to elaborate on the research location and participants of this ethnographic research. Profundity with the research participants is important in anthropological research because we maintain a holistic, qualitative view about the data we generate (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). In addition, the research subject of this thesis is inevitably connected to the perception of businesses and doing business in a sustainable way. Therefore, it is of importance to gain an in depth insight into who they are and what they do. Knowing what they stand for as a company and why they have opted for a sustainable economic system will provide a realistic picture of the economic field in which they find themselves, which is also where this ethnographic research took place.

I get off my bicycle and lock it in one of the bicycle racks in front of the entrance of the building. The building in which MVO Nederland (as of today my new employer and research location) is housed, is a collective building for mainly companies that do business sustainable. The entrance where I enter is at the very end, seen from Utrecht Central Station, of the almost oval shaped building (if you would look at google maps from above, it almost looks like the opening hook on your keyboard). I ring the bell and am let in by the receptionist who shows me the door to MVO Nederland. Suzanne, my supervisor, is already waiting for me. I hang my coat on the coat rack, she asks me if I want something to drink and then we start the tour as the first 'to do' of my very first working day. MVO Nederland is situated in an office garden she explains to me, but only the left part is used by the company and the right part is sublet. It is a somewhat elongated space with a kitchen next to the entrance and at the end, one that only the subtenants use. The part where the office garden of MVO Nederland is located is illuminated by natural daylight shining through the immense wall of windows. A lot of white and green plants strikes me, it radiates neutrality and tranquillity. Besides the desks placed along the wall of windows they also have a number of small cubicles where you can work in silence when needed and of course a number of meeting rooms.



Figure 1: The entrance of the office, made by me

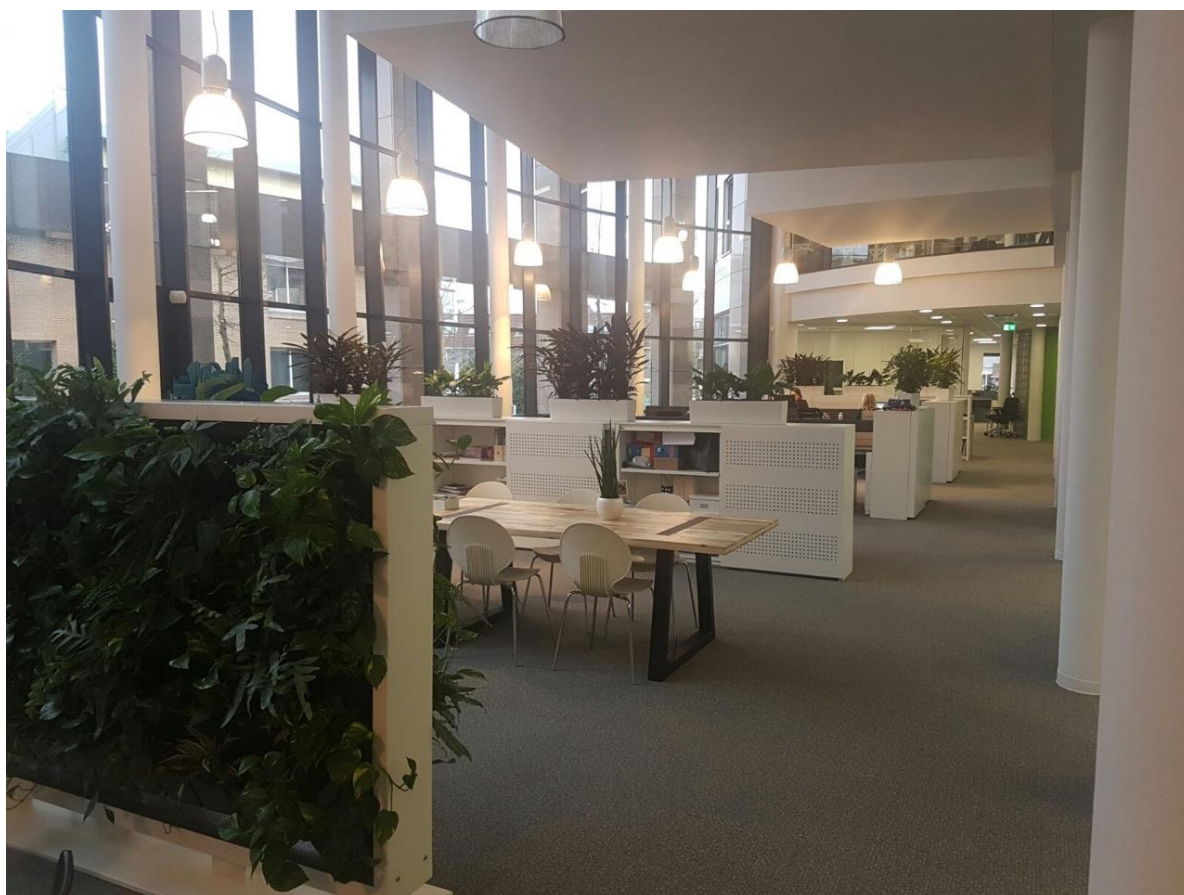


Figure 2: Inside the office, made by me

Suzanne and I take a seat in one of the empty meeting rooms, and so it begins.² *“MVO Nederland is a foundation, with three stubborn boards, one of which is always a woman.”* Suzanne explains. *“This includes a director-director, an operations director and an Economics & Politics director. A total of around 65 people work among them. Above them, the Board of Directors is in control.”* Suzanne, and now me as well, are supervised by the director of Economy & Politics. We are part of the lobby team that is trying to steer politics, on behalf of the partners of MVO Nederland, in the direction of a new and green economy. Little by little, we work through the to do list: the systems I am going to work with are being explained, I get documents send to me that I need to read to understand the background of the lobbying work and I introduce myself to the colleagues who are present at the office. On Wednesday, my last working day of the week because I am only active for MVO Nederland for three days a week, I go home with a happy and somewhat relieved feeling. I noticed that the atmosphere is open and fairly informal. Perhaps I was a bit overdressed on my first day as well. The communication with colleagues, Suzanne and even higher up is open and accessible.

1.1 The where³

In 2004, thanks to the State Secretary for Economic Affairs, 'The Knowledge and Information Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility' was set up with the original aim of promoting knowledge and information about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, governments and citizens. It was founded at the that time because the Social and Economic Council wanted to counterbalance the over-prevailing shareholder capitalism and pay attention to profits at the expense of people and the environment. An entrepreneur was seen as a corporate citizen and therefore had to give something back to society (MVO Nederland 2020). The company has existed under the name MVO Nederland since 2013 and because Corporate Social Responsibility is not the same today as it was in 2004, the focus has now shifted towards taking action. MVO Nederland forms a network of partners (sustainable entrepreneurs) who, together, work towards solutions and implementations that make a new sort of economy possible. MVO Nederland (2020) calls this the movement of entrepreneurs in that new economy. The companies of those entrepreneurs, the partners of MVO Nederland, are often already sustainable at their core, because MVO Nederland only

² Fieldnotes

³ The following part may correspond to Veldhoven, Research proposal, 2020

offers access for those who are willing or will be making the first step to. Frequently, the need to spar with 'like-minded people' or help getting their business model in order is seen.⁴ MVO Nederland mainly plays a facilitating role in this need by bringing their partners together in innovation projects, organising events that inspire and activate, and supporting companies in the implementation of their sustainable goals (MVO Nederland 2020). The company serves as a platform to collect and share knowledge, also towards the government⁵. *'MVO Nederland is that uniting party that is entrepreneurial on the one hand, but objective on the other, because we are not a commercial party.'* Emphasizes Gerard⁶, project manager at the food & agribusiness network at MVO Nederland, during our conversation. *"This gives us, as MVO Nederland, the opportunity to create continuity."*

The new economy, according to MVO Nederland

'When 20% of our economy goes into the new economy, we've reached our goal.' my colleague explains to me during our get-to-know-each-other coffee break. He is responsible for the creation and writing of the New Business Roadmap. *'In transition theory it is said that, if you've reached 20% of change in ... anything, the rest will automatically follow. So, in order for the Netherlands to reach the new economy in 2030, 20% of our economy should be new economy in 2025!'*⁷

According to MVO Nederland, the new economy should be;

- Climate-neutral: Companies have no negative effect on the climate.
- Circular: Without waste and with a large focus on reuse and recycling.
- Inclusive: Every talent counts and participates - with or without restrictions.
- Fair chains: With added value for people and the environment, where human rights and good working conditions are the norm.

In addition, MVO Nederland (2020) states that the new economy should be a future-proof economy.

⁴ Interview: Irene

⁵ Interview: Irene

⁶ Interview: Gerard

⁷ Fieldnotes

MVO Nederland tries to achieve this through the cooperation with their partners who, through this cooperation, take a share in the new economy and thus make their business future-proof (MVO Nederland 2020). The New Business Route serves as ‘the fastest’ route to achieve the transition towards the new economy and is the underlying principle for everything that MVO Nederland believes is necessary to achieve a breakthrough in the new economy⁸. The new economy can be pursued through the seven items of the New Business Route; The first one is New Wealth. This is of importance because money as a business goal does not guarantee happiness and a future free of uncertainty. Still the entire current economic system seems to be focussed on financial profit only (MVO Nederland 2020), something which is also extensively discussed in the book Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth (2017). MVO Nederland aims to achieve a positive social impact alongside the pursuit of financial growth because they believe the new economy businesses should also strive for a better balance in our natural resources, better public health, less loneliness and so on.

The second item of seven, stands for No Such Thing as Free. MVO Nederland states to be standing behind companies that pay ‘real prices’: if pollution would cost more money during the production line, entrepreneurs will try to produce cleanly (MVO Nederland 2020). Fiscal greening is of main importance⁹, and high on the lobby agenda, if No such thing as free should work. The lobby team corporates with an expertise network that was set-up, consisting out of a number of partners and scientists, standing for a revision of the taxation system in the Netherlands. This expertise network wants to implement the concept of ‘the polluter pays’ in order to incline climate friendly processes and make it easier for sustainable entrepreneurs to do business. The polluter pays stands for pricing CO2 emissions. If you, as a company, operate a production line or supply chain that emits a lot of CO2, you would be required to pay for this pollution. This makes that way of doing business, a polluting way, unprofitable. As a result, the taxation system would shift towards doing business more sustainable being cheaper instead of unprofitable as it is now.

The third item on the agenda is Transparent Supply Chains. MVO Nederland (2020) states that it is crucial that entrepreneurs know whether their supply chain partners are climate-neutral, circular and inclusive in the new economy. A chain is as strong as its weakest link, also in terms of sustainability and companies never operate on an island: they are all part of a chain of suppliers and buyers. Fourth on the agenda stands Inclusive Entrepreneurship. It is important to look outside your own bubble, to be able to come to new insights and look outside of the

⁸ Fieldnotes

⁹ Fieldnotes

box. fresh blood is needed. Inclusive entrepreneurship not only stands for giving talents that deserve a chance on the labour market a place, but also about stimulating the vitality and resilience of one's own organisation (MVO Nederland 2020). Being able to think outside of the box can play an important role in getting resilient out of crises (Raworth 2017).

The fifth item is about the transition towards a Green and Sustainable Energy, on which the Netherlands is a long way behind. A green, renewable energy is of importance in order to achieve the climate goals. Sixth on the agenda is Biodiversity. This item stands for the blind spot many businesses have about the importance of biodiversity and destructing impact business have on our ecosystems. Through this item MVO Nederland would like to create more awareness about this topic. And last but not least, the seventh agenda item, Circular Economy. The enormous wastage of raw materials and trash that characterises the old, linear, economy is leading to more and more problems. But these problems can also be converted into solutions, namely by recycling and reusing these waste products (MVO Nederland 2020). An example of such a solution came forward during my interview with Nadine¹⁰, employee responsible for the Future Proof community at MVO Nederland:

M: Could you explain for me what purpose the Future Proof community serves?

N: The Future Proof community is intended as a platform within MVO Nederland to match solutions and challenges placed on it by companies in order to work with each other towards a circular collaboration. Among other things, this has resulted in Verspillend is verrukkelijk in the food sector. But the greatest success of matches we achieve are within the textile sector. There is an enormous mountain of waste fabrics in the Netherlands, but there are also more and more companies that have found circular solutions for this. At the New Economy Festival 2020 an offline platform was organized in the form of an auction. Companies with a residual flow could auction it there. They could then bid on it with a solution. Almost all of the auctions came from the textile sector!

¹⁰ Interview: Nadine



Figure 3: The New Economy festival of 2020, seen from the balcony. Made by me.

1.2 The who¹¹

The textile network at MVO Nederland is for companies that develop, purchase and process textiles into products in various sectors. The companies in this network work together to ensure the high-quality reuse of textiles and transparency in the. *‘The textile sector, with their old business models, hit the wall during the Ragna Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, where it became clear that the big players from our shopping streets have produced clothes at low wages, including child labour and under unsafe working conditions. Luckily, in the case of this event, the urgency to do better was widely reinforced.’* Michiel¹², sector manager of the textile network at MVO Nederland, tells me during our online interview. The aim of innovations within the sector is to make circular textiles as accessible as possible. This can include collection and recycling, development of new business models and (circular) product design (MVO Nederland 2020). MVO Nederland matches supply and demand and supervises projects and processes that are ultimately aimed at achieving the new economy as quickly as possible.

13

MUD Jeans

‘We aim to change the fashion industry, starting with the most popular piece of clothing: a pair of jeans.’¹⁴

The Dutch company MUD Jeans was founded in 2013. Bert, the founder of the company had more than 30 years of experience in the fashion industry and came to realize how unsustainable and unfair this industry was and still is. He saw what happened behind the screen and decided it was time that something had to change. From this came the belief that there was still a possibility to have fun without destroying the only earth and its resources that we have.¹⁵ MUD Jeans aims to keep their supply chain as short as possible in order to work closely with their suppliers, maintain insight into their production and keep their chains honest. The fabrics they work with are biological and vegan, consist for 40% out of post-consumer cotton and the water used during the making process is recycled for 95%. No matter from which brand, you can hand in your old jeans which MUD Jeans will recycle, and gain a €10,- discount (MUD Jeans, 2020).

¹¹ The following part may correspond to Veldhoven, Research proposal, 2020

¹² Interview: Michiel

¹³ Interview: Michiel

¹⁴ Quote, interview: Bert

¹⁵ Interview: Bert

Circular economy principles stand high on the list at MUD Jeans and they always implement them throughout the process of making jeans. In this way they try to master the fashion industry at a different level. ¹⁶The company strives to make ethical jeans of good quality that are available to more people. They launched a pioneering lease system which ensures that they keep hold of valuable fibers and that every product comes back to the company in order to be recycled (MUD Jeans 2020). In order to combat over-consumption, the MUD Jeans lease system allows you to rent a pair of jeans for a year at an annual fee. Are you ready for a new pair? Then you can hand them over to the company, which allows them to recycle your old jeans, in exchange for a new one (MUD Jeans 2020). Bert¹⁷: *"By this way of upcycling, we promote use over possession."* As a company affiliated with MVO Nederland, MUD Jeans has outgrown the textile network. They are far ahead of the sector with their innovations, circular production system and transparent supply chains. All of MUD Jeans is out in the open and every year an extensive report is presented. This is what a company in the new economy would look like, no secrets behind the scenes and honest to people and planet.¹⁸

The food & agribusiness network consists of entrepreneurs active in various food chains such as food service and retail, food producers and processors and producers of starting materials. The companies who are affiliated have the ambition to make the system and their own businesses more sustainable. *"With MVO Nederland, we work towards three principles together with these companies: biodiversity and the sustainable management of natural resources, the protein transition from animal proteins towards more plant-based proteins and the prevention of food waste and valorisation of residual flows."* Gerard ¹⁹explains. By the means of programs, thematic coalitions and projects, new business models and innovations are being developed for achieving the new economy (MVO Nederland 2020). Within the network it is the facilitating role of MVO Nederland to show in a practical way, with those who want to achieve something in the sector and sustainable frontrunners, that things can really be done differently.²⁰ *"We try to attract entrepreneurs with dreams and ideas into reality. And not just specifically aimed at one company, but together with multiple companies that want to look beyond their own little world, that are willing to change. That's the starting point for taking*

¹⁶ Interview: Bert

¹⁷ Interview: Bert

¹⁸ Fieldnotes

¹⁹ Interview: Gerard

²⁰ Interview: Gerard

steps that they won't be able to take alone, but can take with a network." ²¹ For example: Triodos, a sustainable bank from the Netherlands, would like to make land available for farmers who want to cultivate sustainably. In order to achieve this, project groups have been set up within the network to collectively create progress on this issue.²²

Eosta

In 1990 the company was founded by CEO Volkert Engelsman. The name Eosta is deduced from the Greek word "Eos", the goddess of dawn. The idea of the sunrise symbolises how the company finds its way every day by connecting two worlds: that of social idealism and that of commercial realism. Twenty-five years later, the company represents more than a thousand organic and biodynamic growers on six continents, with sales throughout Europe and far beyond (Eosta 2020). Eosta is a distributor of fresh organic and fair fruit and vegetables, specialised in overseas fruit and Dutch greenhouse vegetables. They act as an innovative chain director for more than a thousand growers on six continents. With their 'trace & tell' system called Nature & More, an online system that tells the story behind their products, they offer consumers complete transparency into their organic product.²³

*'Food transparency is very important to us; because Responsible, Together and Authentic are at the core values of our business and form the basis of our innovative approach. They translate into our core competencies Deliver, Dance and Differentiate. A responsible performance and leaving behind a healthy planet (translated to Deliver), comes from collaboration, co-creation and working towards a fair distribution of wealth (translated to Dance). To achieve this, you start with the ability to self-reflect and to distinguish the essential and authentic story of the other (translated to Differentiate). The energy to achieve this we cherish through our Dream about a world as it could be.'*²⁴

²¹ Quote, interview: Gerard

²² Interview: Gerard

²³ Interview: Volkert

²⁴ Passage from interview: Volkert

Sustainable economic systems

In order to move forward to the subject of hope and its relation with sustainable economic systems in the third chapter, it is important to analyse what we can understand as sustainable economic systems first. Also, this chapter will provide some insight on how the current Linear Economy caused a tragedy of our commons, which led us to the crisis called climate change. To minimize an overload of information, this chapter will only reflect on Corporate Social Responsibility, the Doughnut Economy and Circular Economy. These three forms of sustainable enterprise are also the most relevant in this regard because of the relation to the systems applied by MVO Nederland, MUD Jeans and Eosta.

2.1 The linear economy

In 1968, Hardin (1968, 1243) concluded that the earth's natural resources, which are used in common, would steadily decrease regarding the exponential growth of the world's population and he stated that this would be of concern for our finite earth. Hardin (1968, 1244) stated that we are trapped in a system that forces us to grow unlimited while living in a limited world. This kind of unlimited use of our common resources (the commons) brings destruction. In addition, not only do we use something finite as if it will always be there for us, the commons are also replaced by pollution (Hardin 1968, 1245). Hardin (Hardin 1968, 1244) called this The tragedy of the commons: a situation in which the striving for maximum growth and profit of the individual does not lead to collective prosperity but to overexploitation of the commons. The tragedy of the commons model of Hardin predicted the overexploitation of earth's natural resources in the future, which would lead to major environmental implications (Acheson et al. 1990, 1).

At this point humanity is living far beyond the earth's boundaries, overconsuming its renewable and natural resources (Raworth 2012, 6). Since 1970, the Earth Overshoot Day is measured every year. This day marks the date when humanity's demand for natural resources and services in a given year exceeds what the earth is able to renew and give back in that same year. In 1970 this day was December 29, in 2000 September 23 and last year it marked July 29 (Overshoot Day 2020). Besides the fact that Hardin's theory of The tragedy of the commons turns out to be a prophecy that has come true, more than half of the world's population lives below humanitarian borders (Raworth 2012, 6). Raworth (2012, 6) states that we find ourselves in this situation because governments have failed for decades to prioritize resolving poverty

and have not given any attention to understanding and respecting the limits of the earth’s natural resources. Besides these two points, the current linear economy is still focussed on GDP (gross domestic product) growth and has therefore failed to change to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. It is a model of consumption focused on take-make-waste economies (MacArthur 2013, 6). The Linear Economy is a system which contains out of linear supply chains where efficiency is constantly being improved to ensure a maximum output at minimal costs (Schulte 2013, 43). The GDP growth focus of the last century has caused us to find ourselves in economies that are regressive, divisive and destructing the world human wellbeing fundamentally depends on (Raworth 2017, 217).



Figure 4: zerowasteyukon

We might ask ourselves how could this happen? Neoliberalism has been present in our economic system for some time now, seventy years ago the principles of our neoliberal economy were laid down (Raworth 2017, 220). In that period of time the idea that individually made decisions would be the best for the public interest grew in the economic thought, as Hardin (1968) in his paper . But it was not until 1980, when Thatcher and Reagan came to power, that neoliberalism dominated and brought with it destruction (Raworth 2017, 220). An ethnographic research done by Mikus (2016) is a good example of this. Mikus (2016, 223) shows us how the lack of investment in the Siberian public sector opened up opportunities for neoliberalism to become dominant in their economic system an eventually bring on social inequality. It was because of the neglect in the Siberian public sector, which created opportunity, that neoliberalism was legitimated as a moral project and used for social transformation (Mikus 2016, 211). Reagan and Thatcher transformed the central framework of economic thought into a neoliberal one (Harvey 2007, 1-2). Some might see this period in time as revolutionary and a critical point in our social and economic history.

A definition of neoliberalism is often put in relation to marketization, or: deregulation, private property, trade and financial freedom and the reduction of the state's role in the economy (Adamam and Madra 2014, 32). For example: privatization of property has led to exclusion and overexploitation, if we want to go on with using the commons in this way, the global economy will need 1.4 times the earth's capacity (Adamam and Madra 2014, 32). Adamam and Madra (2014, 30) state that we should understand neoliberalism as economization, because only then it covers the project it is of reshaping the lives and livelihoods through this economic framework and the risks that come with it of deepening economic and climate crises. Economization is used as a term to describe processes that economically shape the behaviour, organisations, institutions and objects in a society (Çalışkan & Callon 2009, 370). Behaviour relevant to this term can be found in conveniently designed institutional configurations (Çalışkan & Callon 2009, 380), in the case of this research, neoliberalism.

Despite the global unrest these economic and climate crises cause, governments keep on promoting neoliberalism. With the growing environmental pollution, natural resource overuse and massive global poverty, there is no doubt about a relationship between this and neoliberalism (Adamam and Madra 2014, 30). Because neoliberalism is a consolidation of ideological discourse and practices, it pushes the depoliticization of the social through economization (Adamam and Madra 2014, 34). It is because of this that citizens of the neoliberal state are not seen as citizens with political and social rights, but as economic subjects instead (Adamam and Madra 2014, 36).

Financial markets have become an instrument of privilege for the restoration of class power (Harvey 2007, 90). It is now becoming clear that the unregulated financialization allowed by the neoliberal framework, contains a serious danger of contagious crises (Harvey 2007, 94, Raworth 2017, 221 and Adamam and Madra 2014, 33). For example: the global financial crisis in 2008 and the climate crisis that has been going on for a long time but has recently become more and more visible and therefore more urgent (Volkert: *"There is a slow motion crisis going on, one that we don't see very well but it is there."*²⁵) Due to the current linear system, overexploitation of the commons and lack of safety nets, we are living from crisis to crisis, which is resolved every time with the pursuit of economic growth (Raworth 2017 & Schulte 2013, 43). When times of crisis are present, it shows us the fragility of economic structures on which societies are built, it signals a failure in social reproduction (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). *'What you see is that the old economy is all about risk management instead of preventing*

²⁵ Quote, interview: Volkert

risks. We are working on optimising the old system: sticking band aids on a system that actually does not work well at its core.” Explained by Michiel ²⁶during our interview. “The question is, can such a linear model survive purely in terms of natural resources?” Hans²⁷, supply chain manager at Eosta, states that this system is coming to an end: it is one-sided and a mirror for the limitations of our current economic mindset. Meanwhile, more and more attention is being given to the social and climate impact, but much more transparency is needed.

2.2 What can we understand as sustainable economic systems?

With the current global climate crisis and the and the constant pursuit of economic growth that leads us from one financial crisis to the next, there is need for change. Companies all over the world start, or have done so for quite some time, working by a sustainable economic system (MacArthur 2013, 6). Any system based on consumption rather than on the restorative use of resources, entails significant losses all along the value chain. In this next paragraph the focus will be on Corporate Social Responsibility, the Doughnut Economy and Circular Economy:

Corporate Social Responsibility



Figure 5: exitstrategiesgroup

²⁶ Interview: Michiel

²⁷ Interview: Hans

What is Corporate Social Responsibility? Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be understood as different things, but in the end it is all about taking responsibility for society as a company through this system. It is an integral vision of a company's core activities. ²⁸ *''By applying CSR, we put people in relation to nature back at the core of doing business.''* ²⁹

A company can operate through CSR by taking climate neutrality, circularity, inclusiveness and fair supply chains into account in its activities and processes. By doing so in this way, a company is future-proof. This is why MVO Nederland is convinced that doing business through CSR is not only good for society, but also good for companies themselves: it is a way of distinguishing yourself from other companies in the market. I believe that CSR has a holistic point of view on doing business.³⁰ During my fieldwork at MVO Nederland, the international team was working towards a law of International CSR in the Netherlands to make it mandatory to do business in a socially responsible way and to report on this so that insights into the supply chains of companies become transparent. In October 2020 it will become clear whether the law has been passed by the Dutch government.³¹

The Doughnut Economy

Kate Raworth (2017) states that humanity's challenge for the 21st century is to live within the means of the earth's boundaries and eliminate poverty. In order to achieve that fundamental system change is needed (Raworth 2017, 217 & MacArthur 2013, 22) to be able to construct alternative economic system. A new framework should lead us through this transition: a compass for the twenty-first century (Harvey 2007, 4 and Raworth 2017, 217). Such a compass could be the Doughnut Economy, which brings the boundaries of our earth together with the social ones, creating a safe and just space within the round shape in which humanity can thrive (Raworth 2012, 1). Because earth's boundaries have been made visually clear in the Doughnut, it ensures that the natural resources will remain within sustainable limits (Raworth 2017, 7). People may confuse the Doughnut with Circular Economy, Christel ³²(MVO manager at MUD Jeans) explains to me. But they may not be seen as the same: the Doughnut is more expanded

²⁸ Fieldnotes

²⁹ Quote, interview: Hans

³⁰ Fieldnotes

³¹ Fieldnotes

³² Interview: Christel

and more all-inclusive. *‘If MUD Jeans will grow bigger as a company, we will move from a Circular towards a Doughnut system.’*³³

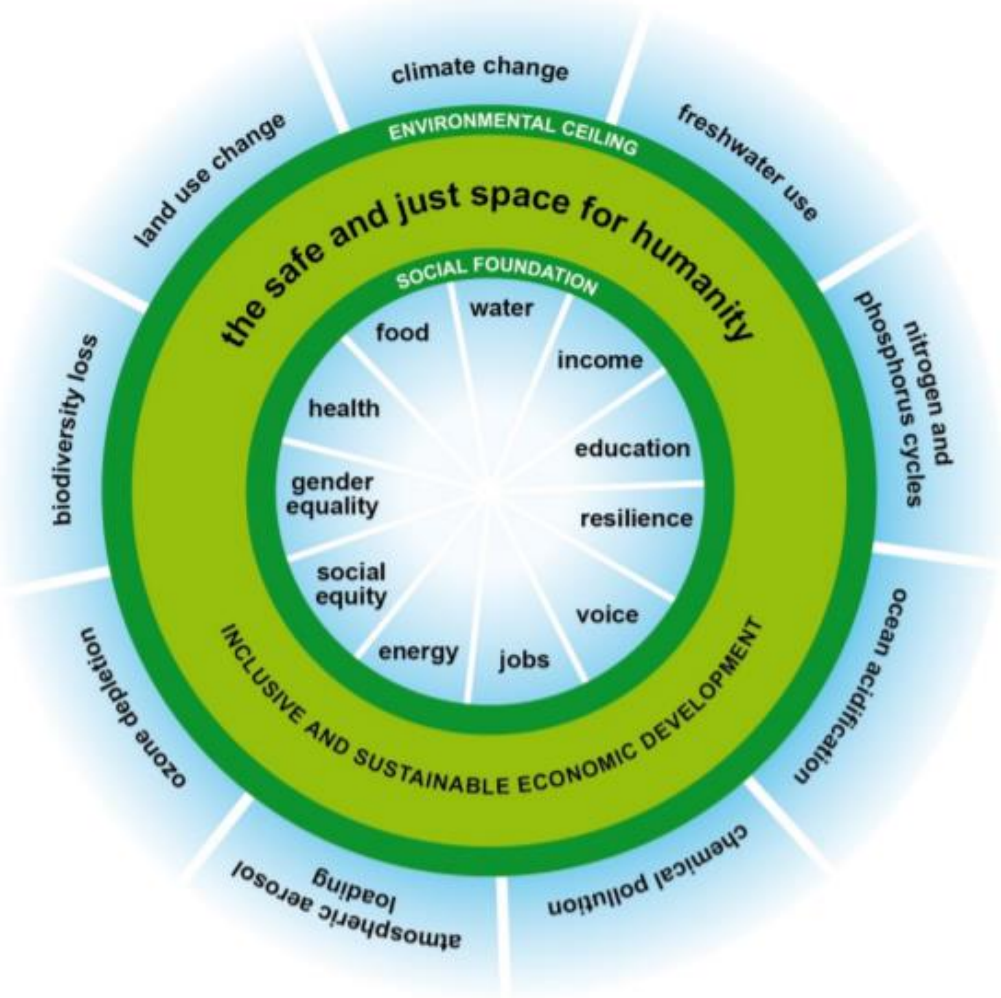


Figure 6: Raworth 2012

In the middle of the Doughnut, the hole, the space of critical human deprivations is represented. Raworth (2017) states that the first step towards fundamental system change is to ensure that all of the world’s population will not be confronted with these deprivations and that there will equal access to human rights and natural resources (Raworth 2012, 7). To be able to use these natural resources within earth’s boundaries, means that these boundaries need to be recognize, kept in balance. In between these social foundations and the earth’s boundaries lies the round formed space, the Doughnut, where human and planetary prosperity are guaranteed and respected (Raworth 2017, 21). *‘The Doughnut sets the playing field within limits and needs.’*

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³³ Quote, interview: Christel

³⁴ Quote, interview: Michiel

The Doughnut Economy is able to show how humanity is depending on natural resources and provides a perspective on how close we are to overstressing these resources. This provides a steady starting point for fundamental change and make people understand the need for sustainability. Using the Doughnut as a compass can transform the current ideas around economic progress from endless growth towards thriving in balance (Raworth 2017, 50-51). It offers the possibility to work towards a new profit definition within those boundaries.³⁵

Circular Economy

Circular Economy is often associated with just recycling, but it is so much more than that. It's about using less or no raw materials and looking for a sustainable alternative, to extend the lifespan of appliances and to repair broken items (MVO Nederland 2020).



Figure 7: industrytoday

³⁵ Interview: Hans

Christel ³⁶mentions that In a linear economy, natural resources are taken from the ground, we make things out of them and they are thrown away at the end of use. In a circular economy, substances are kept at their highest value during use and come back into the economy after use and never end up as waste. This system is about an economy that deliberately works towards repair. It strives to use renewable energy, minimises, tracks and eliminates the use of toxic chemicals and eliminates waste by recycling it. Circular Economy makes a sharp distinction between consumption and use of resources by retaining ownership of its product and taking responsibility for its repair and recycling, eliminating one-way consumption (MacArthur 2013, 22). *‘A circular system is strong because you cannot operate without each other in your chain. If we look at the textile sector, all chains are now unknown to the ateliers, which makes it easy not to produce sustainably. By removing that anonymity, you are already taking big steps to pave the way for sustainable and long-term relationships in your chain.’* ³⁷

Concluding: towards a transition

CSR, the Doughnut Economy, a Circular Economy and many other sustainable economic systems can be explored. But, to quote Volkert, *‘If you look close enough, all sustainable systems come down to the same thing: it is about abandoning our old definition of profit and growth, because where previously our people and planet were available without boundaries and we did not have to take that into account when making profit, now we can no longer do so.’*³⁸ This is also reflected in the model that Eosta has developed for the company, Dream, Dance, Differentiate and Deliver, described in the first chapter. At the core of all these systems it is about wanting to work towards a transition. It is important that we learn from what nature is teaching us, nature where progress is achieved by ever-more-efficient resource cycles, providing resilience and adaptability (Schulte 2013, 44). To understand how different parts have influence one another and the relationship between them is very important (MacArthur 2013, 23).

Throughout this chapter it has become clear that growth oriented systems only know one way of doing business: once market overload is reached, frequency of product replacement must be increased. The current mass production enabled by labour efficiency reduces the costs and boosts demand, while not paying attention to natural resource efficiency (Schulte 2013, 44). The new economy is about innovation and working together to be able to organise the

³⁶ Interview: Christel

³⁷ Quote, interview: Michiel

³⁸ Quote, interview: Volkert

economy differently. *‘‘The reason an organisation like MVO Nederland has a part in this, is because it is not easy in the current economy to make that transition.’’*³⁹ *‘‘As a company alone you will not be able to make your product sustainable, you will need a transparent sustainable supply chain, you need to work together.’’* thus Gerard.⁴⁰

Accepting that there can be no boundless extraction of the earth's resources must stimulate new ways of doing business. The transition from the current way of doing business to any alternative will not be easy (Schulte 2013, 45). The companies that are affiliated with MVO Nederland have a real commitment, no avoidance of risks. When you talk about entering into a transition, this is an important condition for achieving that transition.⁴¹ The need for change is being recognize by companies and governments, but there is confusion about what needs to be changed and how they can achieve it, this is where any sustainable economic system can be of guidance (Schulte 2013, 47).

³⁹ Interview & Quote: Michiel

⁴⁰ Quote, interview: Gerard

⁴¹ Interview: Gerard

The future & hope

This chapter will move towards an orientation of hope for the future to help us make further sense of the role the future plays in shaping the sustainable choices companies make today. We are constantly hoping for and thus living the future through different orientations. One of those orientations is hope. Due to specific situations in the present, like climate crisis, we orient ourselves for a better future through hope (Bryant & Knight 2019). The companies MUD Jeans and Eosta have chosen to work with a sustainable economic system, how is this related to hope for a better future?

3.1 Anthropology of the future⁴²

Economics is a global language, but the fundamental ideas are not accurate anymore, yet they are prominently present when choices are made about our future (Raworth 2017, 217-218). When we talk about economy, we are projecting in the future. The economic actions undertaken now have a clear temporal orientation towards the future based on expectations formed by past experiences and their idealization (e.g. the statement "Everything used to be better"). This temporal orientation may consist of individual aspirations that try to go further in the direction of a general improvement in life chances. In the linear economic system this is expressed as the pursuit of economic growth and the optimal use of natural resources (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 10).

The anthropological view is well placed to study orientations to the future in everyday life. The focus on the present and the future and at the same time keeping an eye on the past, is necessary and at the base of the origins of the anthropological discipline (Posega 2018). An orientation through which to experience the future, as a way to analyse and give meaning to the future, can be hope (I will return to this concept in the next section). Working with orientations gives some insight into the human experience of the present and how we prepare for the future (Bryant & Knight 2019, 2). The term orientations is there to help anthropologists gain an ethnographic understanding of the relationship between the future and the taking of certain actions, including the imagination of the future (Bryant & Knight 2019, 16). Bryant & Knight (2019, 2) argue that the orientations - anticipation, expectation, speculation, potential, hope and fate - reflect different aspects of time and ways in which the future affects our present existence.

⁴² The following part may correspond to Veldhoven, Research proposal, 2020

Because studying the future within anthropology is a new and emerging field, the orientations offer a tool for the researcher to work with (Bryant & Knight 2019, 19-20)

Within anthropology the emphasis has been on the past for a long time. In anthropological studies the continuity of tradition and culture was, and still is, of fundamental importance, often looking at history rather than the future or the relation between those (Bryant & Knight 2019, 3 & Pels 2015, 779). This focus on the past has led to the fact that when anthropology researched something we could call temporality, the future was seen as a temporary problem rather than a research topic (Bryant & Knight 2019, 6). Past studies rarely address the relationship between the collective past and the expected future. Temporality was cut off from the relationship between past and present, even though the future often represented the unknown (Bryant & Knight 2019, 7-8). With anthropologies unique skills and bottom-up approach on the subjects being investigated and the problems faced, the here and now should also be taken in account besides the past. Building a future instead of focusing on the standard academic system, living up to the demands of the present (Posega 2018 and Jansen & Kleist 2016, 379).

With the global financial crisis in 2008, growing risks and now climate change it has become clear that the past is directly related to the uncertain future, these are situations which include a sense of not knowing where the world is or could be going (Bryant & Knight 2019, 9, Jansen & Kleist 2016, 375 & Posega 2018). The practical ability to make the future, the ability to imagine it in the present, is depending on how much uncertainty is experienced in the everyday (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 11). The future in relation to the limits of our earth has gained a more significant role due to climate change. These studies try to look into the future in order to draw scenarios to the present, among other things, through anticipation and hope (Bryant & Knight 2019, 11). The temporality of the linear economy plays an important role in this (Bryant & Knight 2019, 13). Climate change has changed the imagining of a possible future (Posega 2018). *‘‘To develop your prototype for your own company, you look from the present at a future that you would like to see yourself, because your company contributes to that. At Eosta we see this as our Dream that you have to achieve in a joint dance, co-creation. In this way we will also be able to get to the 20% new economy in 2025, the theory of MVO Nederland.’’*⁴³

⁴³ Quote, interview: Volkert

Anticipating the future can remove uncertainty by giving us a sense of what we need to do. But what if anticipating the future is not possible because it has become too uncertain? Times like these are often referred to as times of crisis: times when anticipating or relieving fear is not possible (Bryant & Knight 2019, 43).

3.2 ‘There needs to be hope otherwise we are fucked’⁴⁴

Throughout the centuries, hope has played a major role in artistic, philosophical and religious explorations and reflections. General societal changes are reflected by hope; this is especially apparent in how these changes are presented in the current public and political debates on climate change (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 374). Bryant & Knight (2019,134) state that hope is ‘a form of futural momentum, a way of pressing into the future that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality. It is about something that doesn’t presently exist but potentially could, in the case of climate crisis: the end of humanity on earth.’ The tension between personal expectations, the ability to come up with plans and the ability to actually carry them out comes together in the concept of hope. It is about the possibility of projecting life into the future (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4-5), in which past experiences create numerous expectations that shape present aspirations and hope for the future (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 5).

‘Are we too late? Volkert wonders during our conversation. Yes, of course we are late and we have been for a long time, but we are never too late to do anything about it. The ‘are we too late question’ I do not really believe in. I see more and more hope coming up and becoming part of so many subjects. In addition, there is a fantastic young generation out there who are no longer satisfied with the current policy. I have always been hopeful and positive, otherwise Eosta would never have existed. The entire sustainability movement radiates hope, vitality and positivity, otherwise we would never have started. I really believe that!’⁴⁵

Hope as a subject for research, articles and movements has had an enormous boost because the subject reflects on social changes and uncertainty, anticipation and the place the future has in the present (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 374 and Pels 2015,789). Hope can be seen as a way of dealing with indeterminacy. It is the affective result of trying to bring certain "other ways" into

⁴⁴ Quote, interview: Volkert / The following part may correspond to Veldhoven, Research proposal, 2020

⁴⁵ Passage from interview: Volkert

the present, in the case of this thesis, sustainable economic systems. This can take place, for example, through utopian thinking (Bryant & Knight 2019, 134 and Jansen & Kleist 2016, 377). When we try to imagine a certain future by means of utopian thinking, for example, hope is an important means when there is a lack of material means to do so (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 11). Hope and utopian thinking is also exactly what Gerard remarked in the interview:

“The motivation that companies have to do things differently is also connected to having hope. People who work with MVO Nederland are often optimistic, see that things are not going well and the challenge is only getting bigger (especially if you look at the theme of food), but those who pick it up all say: we just have to work with it and show that things can be done differently. I also believe that entrepreneurs are not pessimists, why else do you start a business? They are entrepreneurs with a very clear vision about where it should go, visionaries who see how things could be done differently and choose for that alternative.”⁴⁶

“There needs to be hope otherwise we are fucked.” Bert says to me. *“Our generation needs to take responsibility.”* Bert worked in the textile sector for eight years and in that time he saw the world of quality fashion explode into fast fashion: *“That monster changed everything.”*⁴⁷ He founded MUD Jeans from the hope, knowledge and experience that things could be different. With the company he wants to show that sustainable entrepreneurship in the textile sector is indeed possible. MUD Jeans works completely transparently, everything about the process, the chain, the materials is out in the open so that competitors can take the information over if they want to. For Bert this is hope, sharing his ideas in the hope of inspiring others, will follow and change the market. He hopes to be an example to others, to be able to influence the future through changing the present in a positive way.

Rethinking the economy is an challenging project (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). Transition thinking could be a tool for this: if you put a point on the horizon from hope and start back casting that way. *“Suppose it is 2030, what do we want the economy to look like?”* addresses Michiel.⁴⁸ *“What do we see then?”* When that point is set on the horizon, if you know what you want the future to look like, then you start back casting to see what it takes to reach that point. That transition, from a linear to a sustainable economy, is still being worked

⁴⁶ Passage from interview: Gerard

⁴⁷ Quotes, interview: Bert

⁴⁸ Quote, interview: Michiel

on. Transition thinking means not only innovating but also phasing out the old economy. How do you get that old business model out? This does not happen overnight, it requires a complete system change. Companies that are affiliated with MVO Nederland often let it be known that they have limits to sustainable entrepreneurship within the current Linear system, that they need more from the government because they are now often investing in the wrong things, which Gerard⁴⁹ gave a good example of: there are many sustainable farmers who want to put more trees back on their land, because this is good for the climate, soil health and biodiversity. But the European Union grants aid on the basis of how much production land is available, which is therefore contradictory.

Concluding: hope and sustainable economic systems

Hope reflects social change (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 374) and the combination of hope and crisis makes people reconsider the nature of the current economic framework (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). Situations of crisis disrupt expectations, reconfigure values and rearrange ideas about moral obligations. As a result, imaginations of futures that were once possible and how to realize them are being affected (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). Ideologies such as neoliberalism have shaped the reasoning and political imagination of many people around the world, as was highlighted in the second chapter, including dreams of progress and the promise of improvement (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 377). Those who do not fall victim to these changes and realize that their lives and dreams do not have to be determined by them, discover hope to be able to change frameworks for a better future (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 378). In this case companies that choose a sustainable economic system are those who dream of a viable economy that makes life worth living for the future generation (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). *‘People are looking for the meaningfulness that is anchored in sustainability.’*⁵⁰

*‘There are plenty of companies who, out of hope, have the concrete goal of making their business model sustainable, but the hope that the entire system will change is related to this, because otherwise we will not make any progress.’*⁵¹ The Ragna Plaza disaster meant that more progress could be made by showing urgency. Even if this is just one example of the sense of urgency, there is more and more fatigue when it comes to for example fast fashion. There is a shift from quantity back to quality, which can be seen, for instance, in the success of MUD Jeans. The hope is now that the old economic system will gradually be phased

⁴⁹ Interview: Gerard

⁵⁰ Quote, interview: Volkert

⁵¹ Quote, interview: Michiel

out and the new economy can be implemented in cooperation with the companies that have already made the choice, because they believe that a future with a better and healthier climate is possible. Daring to take risks and showing entrepreneurship are necessary to take this step.

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⁵² Interview: Michiel

Re-interpreting the economy: going green for a better world after corona

And all the sudden, the world stood still. As we still find ourselves in the midst of the crisis called corona, an economic crisis is lurking, while the climate crisis has never been on pause. Many things are still unknown about the virus, but I think we can all remember the pictures of Italian health care workers with their faces covered in bruises because of their masks. It is real, it is here and it is affecting our everyday lives but also our future. The corona pandemic also affected our economies worldwide, which led to many discussions about the amounts of possible economic support packages and the green conditions that should or should not be attached to them. In addition, many sustainable entrepreneurs and scientists argue that we should not want to go back to 'normal', because that is what would have put us in this situation in first place. In this fourth chapter I would like to take you with me and show what happened during fieldwork. Next, I shed some light on the corona pandemic through text analysis in order to clarify the 'not back to normal' subject, where I explain why we need to re-interpret the economy by going green supported through my own data.

4.1 March the fourteenth of 2020

At the very beginning of my fieldwork period I took a weekend trip to Paris. Little did I know that while being there, everything would change for me and my research:

It is Thursday the twelfth of March, five o'clock in the afternoon, when I board the Thalys at Rotterdam Central Station. In addition to my weekend bag, I am also carrying the food I have just picked up at the station, which serves as dinner during the journey. A little over a month now I am active at MVO Nederland as a working student. My first workday took place in the first week of February. During the first month, I have mainly spent my time getting to know the company and getting used to the work. In addition, I spend those three days at the office looking around me and writing down as much as possible in my field diary, a notebook that I always take with me. After all, the phase of participatory observation and fieldwork is in full swing. But I have to say, I had forgotten how exhausting it can be, those whole days spend behind the laptop and all that new information. A weekend trip, a weekend in Paris, serves as a welcome break.

That same week it was still unsure if we would or even could go. The issue of corona has been discussed several times, to name one: at the lunch table of MVO Nederland, and the news is paying more and more attention to it. So far it is clear that the virus has moved from Wuhan in China to the rest of the world, including Europe. Several colleagues have had to cancel their ski trips to Italy because of the lockdown there and negative travel advice. More than once we discussed whether or not we should travel to France, but in the end the decision was made that as long as there is no negative travel advice and we do not hear anything from the Thalys, we just go. So there we are, in the train on our way to my favorite city! You do not notice anything about corona around here. But that changes when I want to take my boyfriend to my two favorite museums in the city; the Rodin museum and Musée d'Orsay. At both we find ourselves standing in front of a closed door. Apparently, I do not normally follow the news on holidays, the president has banned all gatherings of more than 100 people as of today. Which also means that venues for more than 100 people have to be closed. When, at the end of the afternoon on Saturday, we receive messages from family and friends as to whether we are still able to come home, reality only really hits us on that day in Paris. We try to find news about France on our phones, "Marcon closes all restaurants and public facilities in big cities as from this Sunday", the articles read. We quickly check the Thalys website to see if our return trip tomorrow will even go through.

Saturday the fourteenth of March 2020 is for me the day that everything changed, in one fell swoop the world stood still. The new reality is that after 1.5 months of physical fieldwork and participatory observation, we are all at working from home now. I no longer have access to the office of MVO Nederland and the university library. My 'office' is now in the bedroom next to the bed since my boyfriend also has to work from home, his 'office' can be found in the living room. Both MVO Nederland and the university were looking for ways to tackle this new reality in first two months while I was just patiently awaiting. At MVO Nederland it became clear that everything was at a standstill in the beginning, entrepreneurs were and are afraid. Nobody knows how this will go and what the effects will be on the economy. Some of my colleagues even wonder whether it is appropriate to talk about doing business sustainable if everyone has something else on their minds, namely survival.

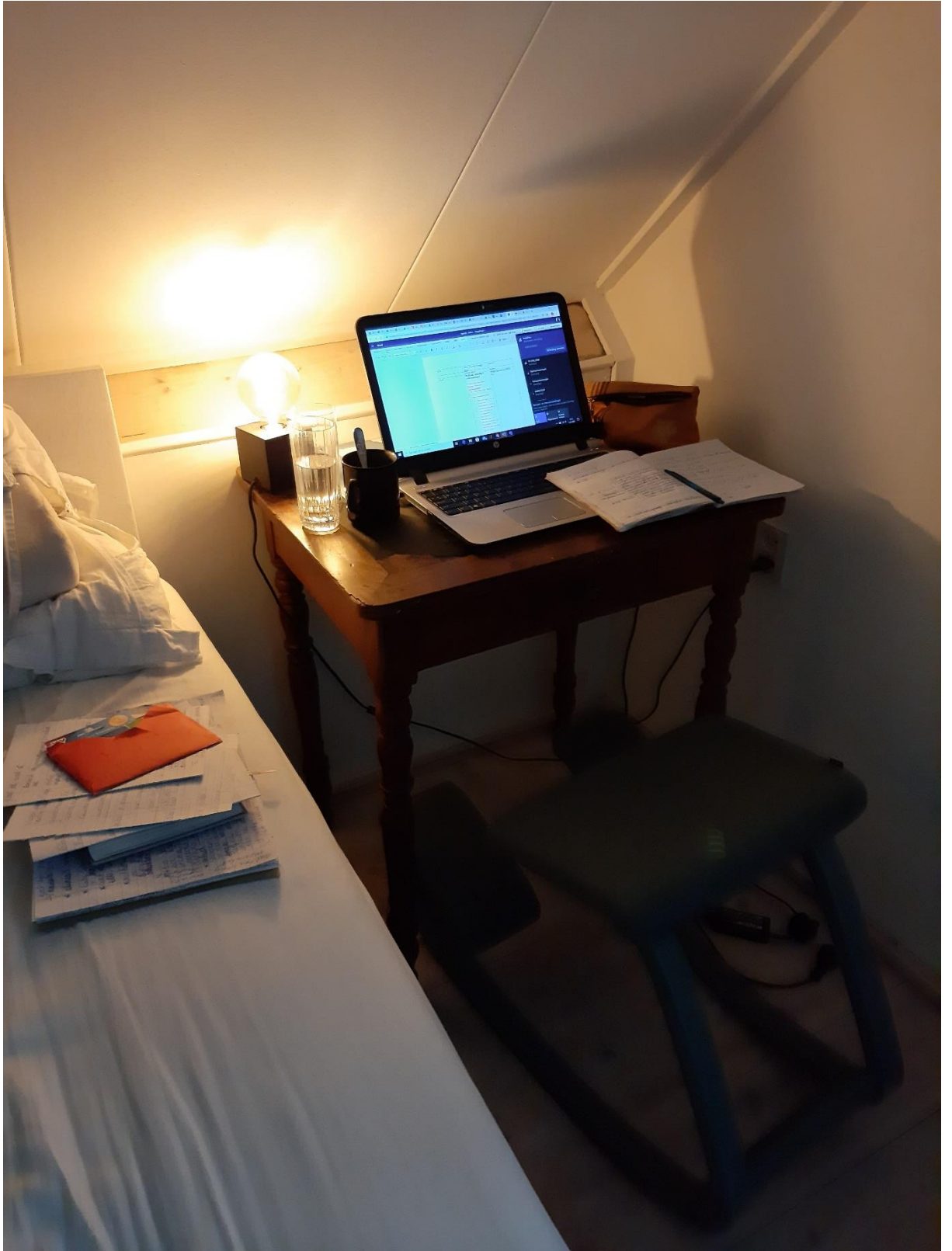


Figure 8: from the office to a corner in the bedroom, made by me

4.2 The corona pandemic

How did we ended up with a pandemic? Caduff (2020, 1) examines shortly what happened and henceforth the global response on the corona pandemic in his article. He questions how we ended up in a space of thinking, acting and feeling with extremes being the norm. In a short period of time we saw health care workers pushing over their limits, migrant workers unable to go home because of shutdowns on transportation, stranded in the cities where they worked and so on (Caduff 2020, 1-2). With many countries in lockdown, the world has almost come to an complete standstill. But there are still many things unknown regarding the corona pandemic. We now know that the outbreak seems to have started in Wuhan, a city in China, in December 2019 and that Wuhan was under lockdown by January 2020 (Caduff 2020, 2 & Vidal 2020). The article of Vidal (2020) in The Guardian shows us the undeniable connection between the wellbeing of humans and that of entire ecosystems. Vidal (2020) states that there are researchers who believe that the ongoing destruction of biodiversity caused by human activity, creates the perfect conditions for new viruses like corona to arise and spread. When an ecosystem gets disrupted, by for example the excessive felling of rainforests or killing of animals, and its biodiversity changes, viruses need to ‘change hosts’ and people can are therefore getting infected (Vidal 2020).

By February corona had circulated in our globalized world and started to appear in other countries. In March it was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (Caduff 2020, 3). Although there was a lot of criticism beforehand on China’s lockdown approach, it became the norm for more countries than China alone. Italy would become the first country to go in lockdown nationwide, whereas in China it was Wuhan only, and more followed after seeing the shocking images of northern Italy’s hospitals (Caduff 2020, 4). Caduff (2020, 4) states that it was this moment which triggered the pandemic response worldwide and changed everything. The virus has been treated as a global threat, creating an image that falsely assumed everyone on the world being equally impacted and sacrificing, treating everyone the same (Caduff 2020, 5 & Wijnberg 2020). This is just one example of the many ways the pandemic has and will expose policy failures (Caduff 2020, 8-9)

As mentioned, when ecosystems get disrupted and its biodiversity changes, viruses spread to other hosts. This is, among other things, what makes the corona virus linked to environmental change and human behavior (Vidal 2020). Wijnberg (2020) argues that the similarities between the current corona epidemic and the climate crisis are almost innumerable. The corona situation

has already been compared with many events in history, but this comparison does not lie in the past. Corona is climate change in acceleration, says Wijnberg (2020), and we can learn a lot from that.

The first similarity that Wijnberg (2020) mentions is the great invisibility of both problems. It has become clear that the low incidence of corona symptoms has certainly contributed a great deal to the spreading of the virus. As with climate change: most people experience the consequences too little to realize, "Just as Wuhan was once "far away" (Wijnberg 2020). Both problems are invisible to many of us until we are too late. Secondly, everyone is a potential contaminant, but therefore also part of the solution. Here and there are incorrect notions on a planet with one single atmosphere and globalization at play, which makes us all a link between the problem and the solution (Wijnberg 2020). The third similarity is that it affects everyone in the world, but it also discriminates. Caduff (2020) also makes this clear in his article. In both cases we talk of a group labelled the 'vulnerable' and although in both cases it ultimately affects us all, its effects are unevenly distributed (Wijnberg 2020). As a fourth agreement, Wijnberg (2020) states that the solutions require fundamental change on a global level. Both Wijnberg (2020) and Vidal (2020) states that the corona crisis did not come unexpectedly. It is a result of fundamental mistakes in our globalized society, including the destruction of ecosystems which results in the releasing of viruses, which have now become even more visible. Also, what I believe can be added to the fourth comparison, is the lack of preparedness this pandemic shows (Caduff 2020, 13). Crucial preparedness concepts are needed in the corona and climate change response. If anything, this pandemic shows us how radically necessary change can and will be and we have known for some time that the climate crisis requires an equally fundamental redesign of society (Wijnberg 2020). To consider our earth as a bottomless treasure and the air as an infinite waste bin is not 'the normal' we should return to, says Wijnberg (2020). And this certainly corresponds to the basic principles of, for example, the Doughnut Economy (Raworth 2017).

What we see now is corona on the intensive care and the media that make the virus visible to the world. But we have also known for some time that when this happens with the climate crisis we will already be too late (Luttikhuis 2020). The actions taken by the government for the current corona crisis shows us what they are capable of, Luttikhuis (2020) states in his article in the NRC. The most important lesson that can be learned from this is that corona shows that our societies and current economies are insufficiently resilient, there was no preparation even though scientists warned us (Luttikhuis 2020, Heel 2020 & Wijnberg 2020). There is no

doubt that the corona pandemic will affect our environment, health and the our future (Caduff 2020, 15-16), but that does not mean we are not able to change for the better (Caduff 2020, 2).

‘Mankind is able to reflect on itself, the current pandemic is forcing us to reflect, to learn lessons.’⁵³

Jan Rotmans, professor in Transitions at the Erasmus University, believes that crisis’s accelerate change in society because they bring errors in the system to the surface (Jan Rotmans in Heel, 2020). ‘Changes require shock effects.’ he states. Not an entirely new idea, because in 1982 Friedman wrote in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*: ‘Only a crisis - real or perceived - leads to real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are there’ (Friedman in Bregman 2020). Rotmans believes that the corona pandemic marks the end of neoliberalism, a market that can solve it all by itself? Now it has become clear that this is no longer possible and that governments are needed to solve these system errors (Jan Rotmans in Heel, 2020 & Bregman 2020).

Although no one knows what will happen after the corona pandemic, it is precisely this uncertainty about our future that makes us need to talk about it, says Bregman (2020 & Bryant & Knight 2019). Twelve years after the financial crisis of 2008, the corona pandemic is imminent, more intense than ever since the Second World War (Bregman 2020). Today's crisis has a cause that we can now fairly identify. Despite this, we now know more than ever before what the effects of such a crisis can be and the intellectual groundwork on the climate crisis effects are unlimited (Bregman 2020). So why do we seem to find it so difficult to choose a green economy, if it seems so obvious why we need to? The main difference is that the corona crisis seems to be much more acute (Winnberg 2020) but that does not mean the climate crisis would not be our next global pandemic. In the paragraph below I will take you through why and how we should move towards a green economy, before Mother Earth is on the intensive care.

⁵³ Quote, interview: Volkert

4.3 No return to ‘normal’

‘A crisis is a crisis because we see the other situation as normal.’

(Raworth 2017)

Placing the transition to a new economy on the agenda and working towards it can feel uncomfortable at a time of a pandemic that shuts down normal life and marks a hard economic blow for entrepreneurs. But at the same time, this forced pause is also an opportunity to look together at what kind of economy we actually want.⁵⁴ After all, the challenges and long-term goals are still there after the corona pandemic (Bregman 2020). Now that the government has announced a substantial economic support package for entrepreneurs, our country could go all out or, on the other hand, impose inappropriate critical conditions on the issuance of that money. It can also be argued that this is the time to be critical about the use of this money. The items a government with guts, opting for sustainable entrepreneurs and no such thing as free from the New Business Agenda of MVO Nederland are in line with this.⁵⁵ *‘In times of transitions, everyone must be involved (market, companies, customer) and be transparent and responsible’*, Bert tells me during our conversation. *‘Besides that, the government has to create a level plain field.’*⁵⁶

Indeed, the corona pandemic requires governments all over the world to step up Mazzucato (2020) states. Though it will need a very different framing than they have chosen now. Since the rise of the current economic system, with its neoliberal and capitalist influences, governments only needed to interfere when problems needed fixing. As a result, they have not been well prepared to deal with crises as corona or the climate in the nearby future (Mazzucato 2020, Jan Rotmans in Heel, 2020, Caduff 2020, 13 & Bregman 2020). One quite simple example can be found in the fact that the Netherlands is one of the most globalised countries in the world, with abundant trading. We do this in order not to make consumers pay a penny too much, and to get everything out of that country that specializes in cheap production (Staveren 2020). In addition to the fact that most of the world’s population already knew the environmental drawback of this, during the shutdown of economies worldwide it became more

⁵⁴ Fieldnotes

⁵⁵ Fieldnotes

⁵⁶ Quotes, interview: Bert

than clear by corona that this causes problems in the production chains (Staveren 2020). Perhaps this became most visible in the textile sector as Michiel told me during our interview:⁵⁷

Ma: What problems have emerged in the textile sector due to corona?

Mi: What we see is that the old business model is what makes it vulnerable. You cannot do anything as a brand now because nothing is made here in the Netherlands, it is all imported. Just look at the production of masks, where we depend on China. In the Netherlands we do not have the appropriate materials for this because in Europe we hardly have any weaving mills anymore. What this shows is that when you do business in a globalised world, you have become too dependent.

Corona has exposed the lack of resilience of a global economy that is extremely specialized in long supply chains. This situation could be the definitive turning point of excessive globalisation (Staveren 2020). Volkert⁵⁸ emphasizes that this shows the need to move away from a linear economy. Besides the fact that the earth's raw materials are not infinite, businesses are too dependent on these supply chains. The linear economy no longer pays off and that is now being seen, the economy needs to move towards a modular economy that is capable. Which is also underlined in the editorial of the NRC (2020). This pandemic has created the opportunity to understand how to do capitalism different, which requires government to move towards actively shaping and creating markets that can bring the world sustainable and inclusive growth (Mazzucato 2020 & Raworth 2017). Now is the time to learn the hard lessons of the global financial crisis in 2008, because it is possible to attach conditions to bailouts that transform sectors so that they will be part of a new economy (Mazzucato 2020).

Frans Timmermans (in NRC 2020), first Vice-President of the European Commission and the European Commissioner for the European Green Deal, states that we can work towards that new economy by replacing the old one with a clean and efficient alternative in all sectors. Now is the time to invest in the new economy in order to come out of the crisis better than when we went into it, so that we are ready for a future that is sustainable, inclusive, competitive and well prepared (NRC 2020 & Heijden 2020). Why we should not want to go back to 'normal'? The corona crisis is only temporarily, while the threat of the climate crisis is here to stay long term (Bijlo 2020 & Heijden 2020). The need to create an economy within the planetary

⁵⁷ Passage from interview: Michiel

⁵⁸ Interview: Volkert

boundaries should be understood by governments and businesses worldwide (Bijlo 2020 & Raworth 2017).

Concluding: the opportunity

The corona pandemic changed the world in a way we might not have thought possible. When times of crisis are present, it shows us the fragility of economic structures on which societies are built, it signals a failure in social reproduction (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). But that does not mean we are left empty-handed, in a way it also created hope for a more sustainable world and shows us how resilient people can be when change is really needed. Because if there is one thing that makes the above paragraphs clear and which is being acknowledged by more and more people, it is that out of all this misery an opportunity has arisen to do something just with the situation we have ended up in all over the world: accelerate the building of a new, green, economy. An economy that is climate-neutral, circular and inclusive, also in the chains. And not the old one, with its flaws and negative consequences for people and the environment, as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

Through an triangulations of ethnographic methods, this thesis displays how nations of hope and sustainable economic systems are informed and constructed by perceptions of the future. This was established by the cooperation with MVO Nederland, MUD Jeans and Eosta. Due to the corona pandemic, the research is supported by the fourth chapter trough texts analysis to elucidate the current situation and its impact on the future of the economy.

Providing more context and information on the research location and participants was important to maintain a holistic view about the companies who choose sustainability (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Knowing what they stand for as a company and why they have opted for a sustainable economic system provided a realistic picture of the economic field in which they find themselves, which is also where this ethnographic research took place. By shortly outlining the history of the Linear Economy and the corresponding concepts of neoliberalism, economization and The tragedy of the commons, the thesis has begun to build the debate and social relevance. This description of history has illustrated why companies within the Linear Economy would want to choose a sustainable alternative. Because at this point humanity is living far beyond the earth's boundaries, overconsuming its renewable and natural resources (Raworth 2012, 6). They understand that change is needed and they have hope for a better future through doing business in a sustainable way.

As stated, hope reflects social change (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 374) and the combination of hope and crisis makes people reconsider the nature of the current economic framework (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). Situations of crisis disrupt expectations, reconfigure values and rearrange ideas about moral obligations. As a result, imaginations of futures that were once possible and how to realize them are being affected (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). Ideologies such as neoliberalism have shaped the reasoning and political imagination of many people around the world, including dreams of progress and the promise of improvement (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 377). Those who do not fall victim to these changes and realize that their lives and dreams do not have to be determined by them, discover hope to be able to change frameworks for a better future (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 378). In this case companies that choose a sustainable economic system are those who dream of a viable economy that makes life worth living for the future generation (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4).

The corona pandemic changed the world in a way we might not have thought possible. When times of crisis are present, it shows us the fragility of economic structures on which societies are built (Besnier & Narotzky 2014, 4). The pandemic actually confirms that things

have to change for the future. It has made the problems of our current linear system, which has been discussed before and more often, visible to those who may have been sceptical at first. That is perhaps the point that increases the success rate of a transition this time and strengthens hope. The future, we are reminded again and again, is not given, it is always in the making and we must maintain this openness at all times in our analysis and, where relevant, in our political engagement too (Jansen & Kleist 2016, 379). Due to corona it seems that our leader largely lack the tools to deal with sudden types of crisis and change. The need for system change is being recognize, but there is confusion about what needs to be changed and how they can achieve it, this is where any sustainable economic system can be of guidance (Schulte 2013, 47).

Reflecting on the research questions stated in the introduction of this thesis, the corona pandemic created an in the moment situation of a crisis which changed the perception of the future. The relation between an uncertain future due to the present has been exposed by corona even more, and gave companies operating with sustainable systems even more hope to advocate a rethinking of the linear system.

One final note

By approaching hope and the future in a time of crisis, through the anthropological lens of this research broadens the academic knowledge of these concepts. Although I need to make note of the fact that this research has been conducted by me, just a master student from the Netherlands at the beginning of her anthropological career. Partly limited by the worldwide corona pandemic we have gotten ourselves into, the data I have collected is not as broad as I had wished it would be. Despite this, the results that did emerged support the reason for a green transition after corona. Therefore, I would suggest further research into rethinking the economy through the transition theory. If necessary, this could also be further developed into research towards advice for the government: how they can take steps towards the transition in cooperation with those entrepreneurs.

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Appendix

List of participants

Suzanne: My supervisor. Lobbyist at MVO Nederland.

Irene: Versnellingshuis employee at MVO Nederland.

Nadine; Future Proof Community employee at MVO Nederland.

Michiel: Sector manager of the textile network at MVO Nederland.

Bert: CEO MUD Jeans, leader at MVO Nederland in the textile network.

Christel: MVO manager MUD Jeans.

Gerard: Project manager at the food & agribusiness network at MVO Nederland.

Volkert: Founder Eosta, leader at MVO Nederland in the food and agri network.

Hans: Supply Chain manager Eosta.