Taking action

BAS ZAALBERG

MSC HYDROLOGY

I am annoyed by how we continuously shape and exhaust the earth for our needs. On the contrary, we should shape our needs to what the earth requires. If we care, it means there will be moments when we cannot take or get what we want. The act of shaping the world to our needs suggests that we understand the way the world turns. This is very arrogant as history has repeatedly shown that we have not mastered the earth's processes at all.

Many humans live their days without being overly conscious of diet, sufficient sleep, or other things that might help a malfunctioning immune system. Until they get sick. Then, suddenly, healthy diets, vitamins, and doctors' prescriptions appear! We see the same negligence when it comes to how we treat our planet. Recently, the first paper claiming that the Greenland Ice Sheet has melted past the point of no return appeared, implying an irreversible rise in sea levels.⁵ In view of this, the planet seems to be sick. Yet, somehow we are ignoring the doctor's advice. Rather, our leaders seem to care more about preserving their power and positions, supported by forceful lobbies and motivated by personal benefits.

Take an everyday example of (in)efficiency: supermarkets. The tomatoes are from Spain, Dutch-caught shrimps are peeled in Morocco, then returned for sale in the Netherlands. Grains have a water footprint of 3000 litres per kilo, every egg equates to 135 litres, and your cotton shirt consumed 3500

⁵ King, Michalea D., et al. 'Dynamic ice loss from the Greenland Ice Sheet driven by sustained glacier retreat', *Communications Earth & Environment* 1.1 (2020): 1-7.

litres of water! Cow milk, sold at half the price of oat milk, has a larger water footprint and higher production costs. Meanwhile a minority of shareholders fill their pockets off the back of exhausting farm work. If we are to see progress, we must acknowledge that our problems are deeply integrated and complex. Local and fair trade products and efficient water (re)use may be a good starting point.

Thankfully, in my surroundings, I see an increasing number of (young) people who are active and convinced of the need to take care of our planet. More often it is seen as 'cool' to work or put effort into planet-preserving activities, like clean-ups, PhDs in relevant subjects, and initiatives or solutions through e.g. start-ups or NGOs. Nevertheless, the exhausting relationship we humans have created with the planet continues. We must find and encourage each other by connecting through networks and with the help of platforms for (the execution of) ideas. Blaming and pointing fingers is wasted energy, rather the stage needs to be cleared for some fresh and innovative ideas about living with our planet. Ultimately, the only ones to blame for not picking up our piece of the puzzle, step by step, day by day, will be ourselves.