

Report of Doughnut D-Day 15-09-2018

The first Doughnut D-Day was held in Amsterdam. The DDD aims to tackle major themes related to both the inner ring of the doughnut (the presence of social infrastructure) and the outer ring; the danger of overburdening the earth.

That such an initiative carries with it a great promise almost goes without saying. The themes are intertwined in a variety of ways, from social justice to air pollution. It is all the more unfortunate that the event failed in several important respects.

In what follows I will attempt to represent the essence of some of the presentations given.

Kate Raworth and the Doughnut Economy

The day started with a pre-recorded message from Kate Raworth. The general idea of a Doughnut Economy was introduced. In a world of finite resources, unlimited economic growth is a contradiction. Simultaneously, the economy should serve the people, rather than the other way around. The basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, education, health, and energy are to be taken care of.

Thus the economy is to be reformed to accommodate both the limitations of earth's resources and ecosystems, and the universal needs of the people in it. The economy is to be redistributive and regenerative by design.

Two aspects of this broad view I find particularly interesting, and were hinted at in Kate's message. On the one hand there is the partial abolition of intellectual property, as is suggested in her book. In the new economy, products of the mind are to be viewed as part of the commons. This means that, for instance, knowledge acquired through public funding should be made open access.¹ While this general idea could help developing regions tremendously, and is very appealing, it is as yet unclear just how far one can go in the abolition of intellectual property, or even how to go about it.

A second aspect that was not expanded upon is the implementation of a basic income scheme. While the idea of a basic income bears great promise for the alleviation of systemic poverty, one would like to hear some kind of plan on its implementation, including suggestions concerning its financialisation.

Harro Boven from Young Democrats: Basic income

The second talk detailed a sketch of a plan for the implementation for a basic income. In this particular proposal, the amount received depends on the living situation: 1200 euros for people living by themselves, 600 for anyone living with other(s), and 300 euros per child. Although it might be the case that, as the speaker states, such conditions can be checked quite easily using the municipality's electronic files, the effects of this conditionality were not expanded upon.

¹ In this case, we might allow ourselves a dose of optimism about recent developments. In the Netherlands, for instance, the Dutch association of universities NSVU attempts to make all publicly funded research open access by 2021. We wish them good luck.

The plan would cost 164 billion Euros a year. Removing current social benefits could amount to a saving of 120 billion. The remainder is to be acquired through taxation on capital, environmental taxes, and taxation of inheritance.

Two things are shown by this example. On the one hand, a B.I. Can indeed be financed with relative ease. On the other hand, the details of any model betray a political preference. The first of these characteristics can unify people of various political affiliations to the banner of B.I. The second of these can tear such coalitions apart.

Anne Knol Milieudéfencie and car traffic

Milieudéfencie sent a delegate to discuss the situation of road traffic, in particular car traffic. The effects of air pollution claim the lives of several tens of thousands of people each year in the Netherlands alone.

The general principle to be used is the following. To ensure change, make sure that the self-interest of participants is served in a direct way. The speaker warns us, though, that even this might not help. The example given is of some people taking a detour, so that their own neighbourhood is not burdened with the fumes emanating from their car. This obviously merely transports the problem to another area.

Another problem is that many of the solutions to the problems of current-day car traffic are expensive to the individual consumer. The purchase of an electric car, for instance, is really a luxury unaffordable to the lower classes of society. It thus becomes apparent that *the ethical life* is, at least to some extent, dependent on one's financial situation. Apart from lamenting this unfortunate state of affairs, the delegate could say little on how to combat it.

The fear to lose something makes it difficult to enable a societal change. This is why we will need to work on the inner side of the doughnut, in order to be able to work on matters on the outside of it.

Meanwhile, the fossil fuel industry manages to leak its conformist message into the public space of schools. The more fossil fuel companies receive unfavourable attention in the media, the more they manage to infiltrate into institutes of education.

Klaas van Egmond on the role of money in society

In the beginning, our values stood as pillars to guide our every action. The (monetary) infrastructure, the economy, was erected to support our values, and money itself served this infrastructure. The relation between money and our values was/should be as follows: Money (eventually) serves the realisation of values.

It is unclear whether this sketch is informed by one or more historical examples. One could guess, however, what has gone wrong since then. The roles of means and purposes has been inverted, the end goal of actors has become money itself.

The way in which money is created in the present system is deeply problematic. Private companies lend money, during which money is created out of thin air. There is no fundamental reason why

governments, rather than companies, couldn't do a better job at it. Rather than creating money as a loan to private companies, it could be used directly for the betterment of society. Hence, van Egmont asserts that the task of money creation should be moved to democratic governments, allowing us to "re-invert" the relations between purposes and means. This money would enter the economy not as debt (as is currently the case), but as resources to stimulate whatever society as a whole finds valuable. It could also be used to reduce the state's debt.

These deliberations do raise the following question: why is it that a system similar to the one proposed hasn't been enacted yet? Are governments really this powerless with respect to large private corporations such as banks, or are politicians going along with it willingly, in preparation for a second career after politics?

In the present system, sustainability cannot be left to companies. Investors are in it for the money, which is why they will stop any attempt to pursue any other goal, such as making a company more sustainable. More strict rules regarding saving banks from bankruptcy will need to be enacted, banks need to understand that they will not be bailed out again. This is a message most popular in a time when banks are not about to fall.

Herman Wijfels:

Mr. Wijfels reflects on what has been said this day, and gives his interpretation. We have been witness to proposals regarding what "the promised land" would look like. Redistribution of wealth in the form of a basic income, and a thorough restructuring of capitalism, will prove to be necessary ingredients for the future.

Up to this point, material growth has been treated as the supreme good.

We will need to prepare for the transition.

The "masculine" values have brought us where we are, perhaps its time to embrace "feminine" values such as care. Also, we need to connect individual responsibility with ecological necessity. What is meant by these remarks is not very clear, although I suppose Wijfels aims at both a significant change in culture and in legislation. The steps needed to start this transition, and the strategies involved, however, remain up to to the listener.

Concluding remarks

At this point, a participant of the event might enquire why I have not written anything about the 15 two-minute pitches scattered throughout the day. While the stage was given to a number of promising ideas, the format proved to be inadequate for even then most cursory introduction. About half of of the pitchers finally made up their mind about what to say after two minutes, just when the bell rang.

The general atmosphere of the event was a blend of great (almost religious) enthusiasm and optimism on the one hand, and a near total disregard for strategy on the other. For the uninitiated, the talks given comprised a useful introduction to a variety of topics. For those even moderately

acquainted with the ideas of Kate Raworth (the doughnut economy) and the idea of a basic income, few of the presenters offered many new insights.

The attempt is admirable, however flawed the execution. The relations between social and ecological phenomena, and the need to drastically reform our economy in order to deal with these, could have been laid out in a far more comprehensive and convincing way. Whereas the initiative offered people from many backgrounds a platform to help circulate their ideas, there was a profound lack of an overarching philosophy to unify the specific roles of the various organisations involved, a plan to form a cohesive front for systemic change. This void was filled with anti-intellectual appeals to emotions, with at one point special mystical roles attributed to the human heart and stomach, respectfully. The whole ordeal reminded one participant of an echo chamber, in which trumpets of relentless optimism reverberate until one's ears bleed.

Perhaps my expectations were set far too high going into the event. The variety of viewpoints presented, often with radically differing emphasis, makes it exceedingly hard to offer something even close to a coherent (dare I say) political programme. In this situation, perhaps all one can do is allot each organisation its time in the spotlights, like so many grains of sand sliding past one another; crafting a vision of the future to sink into, rather than to build upon.

I hope that at the next DDD, the true task at hand is dealt with in a more serious manner.