



I am going on a holiday and I am taking along

Manfred Max-Neef's principles on basic human needs

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1 Background

'Eten is weten' (Eating is knowing) is an initiative of Innovaders, a Dutch consultancy company of Arno, Jeroen, Gernout and Pepik willing to achieve sustainable innovations. We cook a nice meal and prepare a workshop on a topic related to sustainability.

Our guests, friends, colleagues, clients come to our office to eat and think along. Over the past two years we have used 'Eten is weten' as a forum to try out and share ideas. The topics included Buddhism and management, Waste, The Natural Step, The Ecological Footprint, Deep Ecology, Profit versus non profit, Ecology of Amsterdam and working with our hands doing voluntary work.

On the 24th of October 2002 a very diverse group attended the 'Eten is weten' entitled:

"I am going on a holiday and I am taking along...."

Play the game of needs and satisfiers with us and discover our real needs.



2 Setup of workshop

Objective

Our objective was to try out the matrix of Manfred Max-Neef on needs and satisfiers. In the back of our mind we wanted to find out if and how we could use it in our work as consultants on sustainable innovations.

Participants

The workshop was attended by a mixed group of participants in terms of age, skills and gender: an architect, five consultants in sustainable development, a film maker, a student architect, a street dance teacher, two graphical designers, a personnel manager, an IT manager, two subsidy consultants, an artist and a NGO representative in poverty.

Workshop

We asked participants to brain dump on the following two subjects:

Imagine you are going on a holiday to Asia for three months.....

What state of mind do you need?

What things do you need?

What actions do you need?

What surroundings do you need?

Imagine your are going to live three years in Amsterdam...

What state of mind do you need?

What things do you need?

What actions do you need?

What surroundings do you need?



Johannesburg

After a nice but simple dinner we got to know each other by stating what we remembered of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. The student who had been delegated to the conference as a representative gave his testimony on the issues and commitments: “There was a lot of talking and politics amongst ministers of foreign affairs, there were no ministers of internal affairs to take the issues back home...”

Summarizing one might conclude that human needs in North and South should be taken care of equally and as efficient possible.... sustainable consumption is the future. This is where we come to The Natural Step and Manfred Max-Neef.

Read also “Postcards from Johannesburg” by Susan Burns:

www.sustainablebusiness.com/features/feature_template.cfm?ID=839

The Natural Step and Human Scale Development

Pepik gave a short explanation of the principles of The Natural Step and ideas of Manfred Max-Neef. Gernout explained the matrix. See chapter 3 and 4.

Filling in the matrix

We used the ideas from the brain dump to fill in two matrices: one for living in Amsterdam and one for going on a holiday. See chapter 5. We asked the participants to add extra satisfiers and choose 10 satisfiers that bestly meet their basic needs. Total time period 45 minutes.

Evaluation

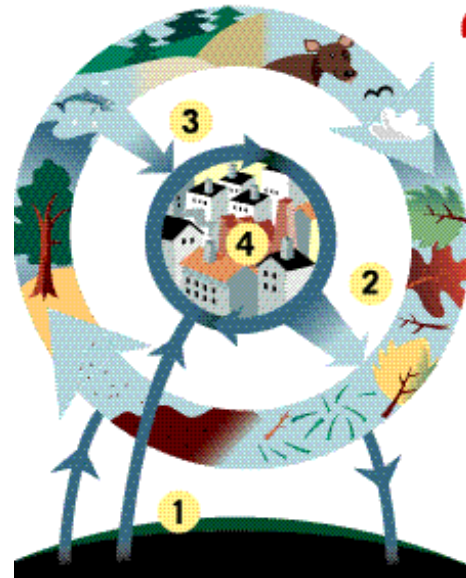
We concluded by asking the participants to give feedback on results and approach. See chapter 6.



3 The Natural Step

The ecological issues were rephrased in The Natural Step by Karl-Henrik Robèrt using four system conditions for a sustainable society:

- 1 In a sustainable society, substances extracted from the earth crust must not systematically increase in nature. Fossil fuels, metals and other minerals must not be extracted at a faster rate than their slow redeposit into the earth crust.
- 2 In a sustainable society, substances produced by society must not systematically increase in nature. Substances must not be produced faster than they can be broken down by nature.
- 3 In a sustainable society, the physical basis for the productivity and diversity of nature must not be systematically deteriorated. Productive surfaces of nature must not be diminished in quality or quantity.
- 4 In a sustainable society, there must be just and efficient use of resources with respect to meeting human needs. About 93 % of what is made is waste and only 7 % is product; we need a factor 10 efficiency in resource use.



See also: www.thenaturalstep.org

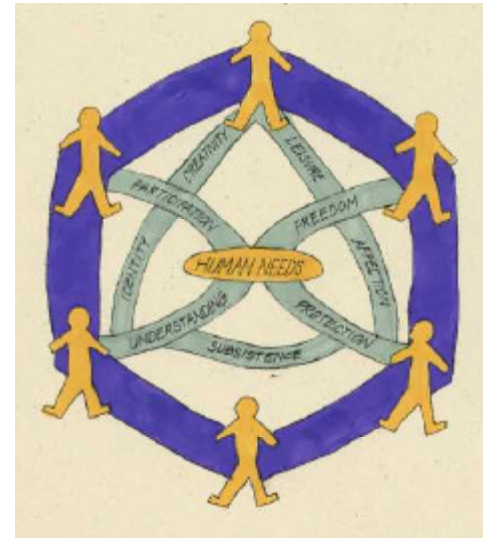
4 Human scale development

Manfred Max-Neef addresses the fourth principle of The Natural Step looking at efficient use of resources meeting basic human needs. Max-Neef is a Chilean economist who has worked for many years with the problem of development in the Third World, articulating the inappropriateness of conventional models of development, that have lead to increasing poverty, massive debt and ecological disaster for many Third World communities.

The main contribution that Max-Neef makes to the understanding of needs is the distinction made between needs and satisfiers. Human needs are seen as few, finite and classifiable. Max-Neef classifies the fundamental human needs as: subsistence (bestaansminimum), protection, affection, understanding, participation, recreation (in the sense of leisure, time to reflect, or idleness), creation, identity and freedom. Needs are also defined according to the existential categories of being, having, doing and interacting, and from these dimensions, a 36 cell matrix is developed which can be filled with examples of satisfiers for those needs.

Satisfiers also have different characteristics: they can be violators or destroyers, pseudo satisfiers, inhibiting satisfiers, singular satisfiers or synergic satisfiers.

The matrix is a good tool to address all kind of small scale issues like sustainable product development for a company or provide an overview of satisfiers and dissatisfiers on a national level.



See also: www.max-neef.cl/publicaciones/articulos/Economic/Egrowth.html

5 Results workshop

We split up in two groups and went to fill in the matrices: one for living in Amsterdam and one for going on a holiday.

The groups worked quite differently. The A'dam group found out that “sex” and “humor” were the buzz words and met all human needs, which resulted in a lot of laughter and funny satisfiers: “sex with beschuit met muisjes”, “sex as medicine”, “sex on a bike”. Off course they also had several other satisfiers.

The “holiday” group worked in a more serious mode and concentrated hard on how to fill in the matrix. It was quite a rational approach resulting in selecting 10 quite well balanced satisfiers at the end.



You go on a holiday to Asia for three months and your satisfiers are

Fundamental Human Needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence	rest, careless	back pack, clothes	taking rest , sleeping	hotel/ sleeping place
Protection	careless	vaccin, backpack, money, passport		cities
Affection	travel lust, curiosity	holiday lover, gifts, teddy bear		nice/inspiring people , old city, nature
Understanding	curiosity , learning	travel guide	discovering, tasting new cultures, being curious	ruines, authentic surroundings
Participation	open mind/character	credit card, dices (=dobbelstenen)	discovering, integrating, experiencing	
Leisure	touristic, rest	dices, sun glasses	back packing, enjoying	Nature, comfort, sun
Creation	curiosity	sketch book, survival knife, photo camera	learning, writing, drawing, experiencing	inspiring surroundings
Identity	careless	money , identity card	back packing , chillen	pure surroundings
Freedom	Free, careless, travel lust	bike, international driving license, mobile home	flying , taking drugs	nice people , spectacular surroundings

In red the 10 main satisfiers are shown. We see synergic satisfiers related to how we want to feel (careless, curious, lust for traveling, taking rest) and some more rational basic needs for getting there (flying) and surviving (money, sleeping place). We like to go to authentic places meeting nice people.

You are going to live in Amsterdam for three years and your satisfiers are

Fundamental Human Needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence	myself, health	food, house	sex	sex
Protection	humor	rights		
Affection	humor	friendship	sex, work	sex
Understanding	self reflection, humor		(voluntary) work	
Participation	humor, sex		sex, work	sex, games
Leisure	humor		sex, (voluntary) work	sex, games
Creation	humor		work, making art, exploring	
Identity	self reflection		work	friends, work
Freedom		rights	work	Myself

This group took another approach and selected only the 10 main satisfiers. Myself/self reflection, work, sex and humor are synergic satisfiers. It is all you actually need, except a house, a bunch of friends and at regular time some food and beverages off course.

6 Evaluation

At the end of the evening we had a short evaluation how everybody experienced this evening.

Strong

- Filling in the satisfiers is a good basis for discussion in the group and is fun.
- List of 9 basic human needs seems to be fulfilling for all satisfiers.
- The game is fun and we have been laughing a lot, that is important.

Weak

- The main questions were too detailed (time: 3 months and place: Asia) resulting that people took “flying” as one of the main satisfiers to be able to go to the destination. Better to make a distinction in “what are your daily satisfiers in a living/working surrounding” and “what are your satisfiers in a strange/holiday surrounding”.
- Starting with brain dumping satisfiers without any theory background results in too basic satisfiers. Better first to hear the theory and then start brainstorming about satisfiers.
- What do you want with these results? It is difficult to expect new outcomes for products, services, etc. (Note: Dutch people always prefer a useful final result, we are only partly interested in the action learning process).

Options for future gamestorms

- Take a product like “car”. Try to fill in each human need how it is met. Try to enrich the matrix by thinking of new satisfiers for (specific) client groups. Try to fill in in a non-materialistic way to get more sustainable results.
- Do your homework and work out ten synergic satisfiers for a certain problem/demand. Ask the group to put them in the matrix and try to understand what is their real added value to meet the demand. Then select the most important satisfiers and see if the demand is still well satisfied.

Innovaders filled in the matrix to see what satisfiers where met on this workshop evening.

Fundamental Human Needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence		nice dinner, shelter for rain		warm cosy office with inspiring material
Protection	care		facilitating the workshop	
Affection	respect of opinions, humor, generosity of giving		analyzing needs and satisfiers	
Understanding	space for critical capacity to think about SD curiosity by questioning	game format, presentations	witnesses explaining	
Participation			meeting new people, expressing, listening to other opinions	new faces
Leisure	laughing		laughing, playing chatting	
Creation	interest	post-its, sheets, pens	creating alternative satisfiers	relaxed atmosphere
Identity		my birthday (Gernout)		heterogene group
Freedom		a beer afterwards		

We hope you all enjoyed it and see you next time !!!