

Anywhere in the world, there are local markets. Whenever I am in Berlin, Taipei or Rio de Janeiro, the smell of fish, fruits and fried food is connected to spots where locals do their groceries. Every Saturday I am such a local at the market in Amsterdam, the city I currently live. Its ten minutes by bike from my house before I store it next to all the other bikes at the Noordermarkt. I smile to Maarten, the entrepreneur who runs the dairy stand. He is the typical grumpy, yet kind hearted owner that I think also every local market around the world will have. He and his younger colleagues recognize me as soon as I empty my bag filled with returnable glass. No plastics, right? - Right. I fill my huge bag with eggs, cheese, yoghurt, cream, butter, and then I move to the other shops, where I get my fruits and veggies, meat for my boyfriend, two fish, lentils, rice, granola, nuts and some coffee. I walk home - I always buy more than my bike can carry. Sometimes my boyfriend, or another friend join in to enjoy this local experience, but often, I go alone.

I am there every Saturday, because I made a choice that for some of you might sound quite radical: I choose to have a household without single-use plastics. In this twenty minutes preach, I share with you how my view upon the world and my view upon circular economy shifted by this choice. Let me explain how I started, why I still do it, and how this choice serves as a pathmaker in the decisions that I make as an entrepreneur running BlueCity Lab.

It was February 2017, I sat in a conference room filled with green people, you know, those people that bring their own container when they visit a local market. I knew the girl who organized the evening, and went there since I was curious as well as to support her. "Nienke, you'll love the keynote speaker", she had assured me. I could not foresee that this night would be cause such change in my life. The woman on stage was Bea Johnson. She lives a simple life without waste with her two boys, husband and dog in California. At every talk she gives, and she gives plenty - she shares her secrets for a wastefree household. Her teeth are shiney, her makeup is wonderful and she makes jokes about why no one asks how she manages without tampons during her periods. That night, she presented a simple, feasible alternative for every aspect of her life - a living proof that life without waste could be joyful and social. I was deeply

moved by her story. She painted a future without plastics that could be my future. That same night I chose to stop using plastics.

By that time, I was in sustainable - plastics - business for three years. I dreamt of becoming a social entrepreneur when studying at Erasmus University, since I wanted to be part of the people who come up with solutions for the complex problems we face today. I joined a startup that fishes for litter, here in Rotterdam - and that uses that plastic for creation of floating parks. Making a useful product from a wastestream, and therefore solving one of the most complex problems of our time: the plastic soup: that's why I joined. As an economist, I like to include the economical perspective too. With the founder and some interns, I organized activities for corporates and municipalities. He often spoke as motivational speaker at big conferences and every Saturday, we went fishing for litter along the New Meuse with an evergrowing group of volunteers. The mission of the startup is to start in Rotterdam, to install the retrievers that would filter the plastics before it would enter open sea. Once our principle was proven we can export this solution to all delta cities all around the world.

I can assure you: fishing for litter it is a deeply satisfying workout. It was a super-cool, meaningful job, but I often felt in despair about the battle that I was fighting. I asked myself many times when I fished litter from the river: where does this come from? Why does it float there? The problem of the plastic soup is so big, and every day more and more plastics float to the oceans, through our rivers, through our cities. But it was not until the talk of Bea Johnson that I realized I had a choice. When I want a world without single use plastics, why did I not think of starting this myself?

We - smart people with a good education - can become anything we want and we are so used to have all options at hand that we do not realize the time we spend on making decisions. The abundance of options paralyzes many of us. We wonder what is our passion? , - and why we don't pursue our dreams? , like those who are living the happy entrepreneurial life, or the

happy vloggers life? We find it extremely hard to make decisions - although that is so important to give direction, and therefore meaning to our lives.

Not making a decision can be extremely wasteful. And the elimination of options can bring effectiveness to your life. Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook guy, made a choice: he wears the same tshirt and the same trousers every day. Eliminating options helps him focus on the things he wants to accomplish. I experience the same effect: I give attention to the act of shopping - once a week - and I don't spend any time on running around in the supermarket at 8 pm - like I used to do when I still had the option of choosing for a last minute visit. My diet improved - since I consciously plan my groceries ahead, I eat more fruits and veggies than ever before, and my food is local, since most products that come from far away need a wrapping to protect them from going to waste.

In the beginning, my friends were surprised by my choice, most of them thought it was really radical. In the past year however, the paradigm in society on this topic changed from the stand that waste is inevitable part of consumerism to a search in finding alternatives to single use plastics. Companies like Ikea announcing to ban single use plastics completely, corporates from all over the world started to take an ever-growing group of customers that are radically opposed to single-use, seriously. Yesterday, Unilever announced to open a single-use-plastic-free webshop. Imagine that.

Nowadays, I run a makerspace and a laboratory in an old swimming pool here in Rotterdam, in former Tropicana, I live together with my boyfriend, and I try to maintain our household as plastic-free as possible. I made a choice, but he did not. He sometimes likes to buy stuff that I did not buy on the Saturdays market simply because he is craving for that particular type of food - and Albert Heijn around the corner of our house supplies it until 10 pm. And that's ok.

Often, visitors of the Lab and of BlueCity ask me how I can decide for the most circular option to go for, in a world that is so complex and depends so heavily on context? When thinking in

systems, like I do, everything is related. I look beyond rational life cycle analyses and look for answers that work in a systems perspective. In BlueCity Lab, we build circular principles using the abundance of the city: the waste, the energy and the resources around us such as ... old swimming pools, and local workforce to run circular thriving businesses. Working at BlueCity, I contribute to an economic system in which waste does not exist.

Because I live that single use plastics- free life in person, as a professional I am able to realize what choices are needed to help society get rid of unnecessary packaging. Interestingly, I did not start this journey with that aim, I just followed my conscience when I made the choice after the lecture of Bea Johnson.

Since I chose for this plastic free lifestyle, I never felt that deep despair again that I sometimes had when I still used plastics. I live the solution now, envisioning a future for us people, a circular one, in which our waste no longer harms our environment, but can be a resource for everything around us.

In the plane back from holiday I explained to the steward that I did not need the food since I lived plastic free. I brought my own containers filled with food from a local market in Taipei, wonderfully steamed dumplings filled with mushrooms and veggies, making everyone jealous who smelled them. Yes, I still sometimes take the plane - although I know it is extremely harmful to our planet. I made one choice, which helps me determining the path I want to walk on. It does not mean I have to change myself into some circular saint. My hope is that you're inspired to make your own choices towards a circular society, intuitively and optimistic.

I am confident that we will be able to shift towards using sustainable materials and radically reduce our unnecessary waste because I had the experience in my own life how powerful and easy it was to change my own habits. I invite you all to start letting go of wasteful habits and embrace a simpler, more healthy life.

How wonderful can we make our planet when we all make choices towards a more waste free lifestyle?