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AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 PEOPLE

by

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Overview

Three examples of entrepreneurs who dream of changing the planet that Mathieu Le Roux and Sylvain Darnil found in the course of their fifteen-month world tour included profitable hospitals which provide free care for two-thirds of their patients and use artificial limbs which are fifty times less expensive than the usual price ; a bank which helps three-quarters of its customers to avoid situations which might lead to severe poverty ; and a chemist who has invented a new business model by which he can recycle a polluting product indefinitely. Sustainable development is often thought to be a costly pipe dream. Mathieu Le Roux describes eighty case studies of men and women who are carrying out surprising projects. Contrary to what one may think, he shows that sustainable development is an opportunity for entrepreneurs.

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TALK : Mathieu Le ROUX

I met Sylvain Darnil, with whom I organised this world tour, when we were both working abroad as a substitute for our military service in Sao Paulo, Brazil. We had a mutual friend who introduced us one evening when we were both looking for a flatmate.

At the beginning of the evening, I asked Sylvain what he intended to do after his work experience, and he replied 'a world tour'. I had entertained the same dream for a long time. His project was at a more advanced stage than mine, but the people with whom he had intended to travel had dropped out, and so we decided to embark on this adventure together.

The trip

We had to find a reason for our trip : going from beach to beach and visiting one monument after another did not appeal to us. We had just read Muhammad Yunus' book. He invented the concept of micro-credit and had founded a bank intended to help the poor, which was surprisingly profitable. When we were at school, no-one had ever taught us about this sort of initiative which was in stark contrast to what we had understood sustainable development to be, namely the subject of very theoretical discussion in scholarly conferences to which the media only referred preferably when there were climatic catastrophes.

This book gave us our guiding principle : we decided to meet men and women who took up the same sort of challenge as Muhammad Yunus, with the same optimistic, pragmatic and entrepreneurial spirit. Telling the stories of these people seemed a much better way of sustainable development than giving lessons in morality.

The title *Around the World in 80 Men* was an obvious choice. However, the question remained whether, in terms of sustainable development, there were eighty success stories that were comparable to that of the micro-credit. We found more than five hundred by searching the Internet and asking NGOs (non governmental organisations). In the course of our trip, we discovered many more which were often cited by people we interviewed and which sometimes existed in sectors which were very different from those of our interviewees. For example, an Indian surgeon pointed us in the direction of an American architect.

Organising the trip took us six packed months, from January to June 2003. The trip itself lasted fifteen months. Our budget came to seventy thousand Euros. One third of the finances came from private sponsors such as Apple or Generali ; one third from public grants such as the Ministry for Youth and Sport's *Défi jeune* ('Young challenge') scheme ; and the remainder was our own savings.

During the trip, we used our website site (www.80hommes.com : created by Astrolabe) to record an account of our travels and portraits of the entrepreneurs that we met. This site was relayed by a mini-portal on the Wanadoo homepage and had two hundred thousand 'hits'. Since our return, we continue to publicise our trip throughout the media as we had promised the people whom we met that we would, by means of conferences but also by the publication of a book¹. Today, Sylvain works for Nestlé and I am a consultant for the BeCitizen consultancy, specialising in the area of sustainable development.

A changing planet

In order to understand the challenges which are the basis of sustainable development, one needs to appreciate three fundamental facts. The first is that the world population has increased from five million in 10,000 BC to six billion in 2000 AD. The majority of this increase took place during the course of the last century. The second concerns the unequal

¹ Sylvain Darnil and Mathieu Le Roux, *80 hommes pour changer le monde* (pub. Jean-Claude Lattès, 2005).

division of wealth : 20 % of landowners own 80 % of the wealth.

The third concerns the environment. Since 1970, the planet has become over-exploited both in terms of material and energy resources. It is not just ecologists who are raising the alarm : the Total group predicts that by around 2015, petrol production will level off whereas its consumption will continue to increase. The same will be true for gas a few years later. In the meantime, the over-consumption of carbon-based products results in huge discharges of CO₂ into the atmosphere which will upset climate.

Despite the fact that we live in a capitalist world, we are forgetting one of the fundamental principles of capitalism namely preserving the capital and consuming only its interest.

Faced with these three fundamental changes in the history of the planet, one can easily become discouraged. The Chinese symbol which signifies crisis offers us an alternative : it consists of two distinct symbols, the higher one meaning danger and the lower one opportunity. The men and women whom we met have adopted a strategy of opportunity. The following case studies are examples of this.

The Grameen Bank

Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi economics professor who trained in the United States. When he went back to Bangladesh in the 1970s to teach macroeconomics, there was a serious famine in the country. Seeing people dying of famine in the streets made him realise that teaching economics was pointless if one was incapable of solving such an obvious economic problem. He asked questions in villages and realised that people were the victims of the cost of credit. Small shoe-polishers did not even own the brushes they used ; they had to pay half their profits to the owner. If they were lent enough money to buy the brushes, they could double their earnings.

He experimented by granting very small loans to forty-two women for a total sum of twenty-seven dollars. Some women bought another hen to double their egg production ; others, such as the basket makers, bought their materials in bulk for a whole week rather than going back to the wholesale merchant every day, thereby losing both time and money. On the day for paying back the loan, all these women paid cash on the nail, including the appropriate interest.

Delighted by his experience, he explained to bankers that they were ignoring a very promising customer market – poor people – for whom it was merely necessary to devise services which could adapt to their needs consisting of loans and small amounts of money, with short due dates and low repayment rates. The bankers laughed at him and when the door had been shut in his face for the fifth time, he decided to create a bank himself.

The result was the Grameen Bank. Its main characteristic was that in a Muslim country where in principle it is only the men who can take out loans, 95 % of the bank's customers are women. No surety was possible because these people were extremely poor : thus the contracts were drawn up for self-help groups which were able to ensure the deposit. Women formed a co-operative of five in order to borrow money. If one member defaults, the others call her to order or pay for her.

The rates of repayment are 99.2 %, a percentage which is better than that experienced in traditional banks and even those in the West. Unquestionably, poor people repay better than rich people ! Above all, there is evidence that such credit helps them break out of the poverty trap : three out of four customers reach or cross the poverty threshold. In no case does the Grameen Bank help them choose or organise their activity. They know very well how to get out of their situation – all they need is the financial means. Finally, the money necessary is used in a very efficient way since it is constantly being reinjected into the economic circuit. Muhammad Yunus has always refused help from the World Bank or other important backers. When he needs to refinance his bank, he issues bonds on the financial markets which are proof of a surprising degree of entrepreneurial reasoning.

The Grameen Bank started out with seventy customers in 1977 and rose to three million in 2001. It exists in forty-two thousand villages. In total, more than twelve million people have benefited from its loans, and it lends 4.5 billion dollars. Today, it is the second largest bank in the country and employs twelve thousand people who are paid the same as employees in traditional banks.

Today, the bank has diversified its activities : for example, Grameen Phone has become the second largest mobile telephone company in the country. The principle consists of selling mobile telephones to female customers of Grameen Bank who then rent out the communication time to their entourage. Today, Grameen Phone has 1.8 million users, and for some of these users, this new tool has an important economic impact : they save up to 10 % of their incomes by checking market prices using the telephone or by concluding a business matter without having to be physically present.

The example of Grameen Bank has spread throughout the World. It is estimated that almost eighty million people have benefited from the same sort of micro-credit which the bank offers.

Breaking out of the trap of the 'grey' economy

Hernando de Soto is a Peruvian and likes to think of himself as an economist in the field. For a long time he studied how the casual (or the so-called 'grey' economy) economy worked in the shanty towns of Lima where those involved are excluded from the formal capitalist system. These people are neither owners of where they live, nor do they have a tax return form for their economic activities and businesses.

He began by showing that 90 % of small and medium-sized Peruvian companies are informal and therefore do not appear in official statistics.

He then tried to create a company to show how complex and expensive an operation this is to do. It took him two hundred and eighty-nine days to obtain the necessary authorisation to create a small sewing workshop in the suburbs of Lima and cost him the equivalent of thirty-one times the minimum monthly salary.

Finally, he developed a theory which concluded that countries which are not able to develop, are countries which do not succeed in 'awakening dead capital'. As far as he is concerned, the first measure a government ought to take, should be to give ownership titles to all those who have real-estate or land. How should one limit the sizes of properties ? As an economist in the field, Hernando de Soto replied that one has to go to the area in question and depending on where one is, one can identify the owner by seeing who is the person who calls his dog in when the dog begins to bark ...

He was able to implement his ideas when he became president of the Peruvian central bank and an advisor to successive governments. This method of giving ownership titles allowed national wealth to increase by nine billion dollars. This real estate existed but had not been listed. Afterwards, three million dollars of monthly tax payments were collected on the basis of this real estate. The owners had already paid this tax but in the form of an extortion racket laid down by powerful local people – drug traffickers or representatives of the 'Shining Path' (the Peruvian guerilla terrorist organisation) – and the owners did not even have any legal guarantees like those that the State was able to provide. In fact, Hernando de Soto survived an attempt on his life by the 'Shining Path'.

Obtaining these ownership titles also enabled the owners to use their real-estate as a guarantee, for example, to obtain credit. At the same time, Hernando de Soto managed to simplify the steps necessary to create businesses : now it just takes a few months and the costs have been cut by one hundred. Today, he is the advisor to several developing countries throughout the world such as Brazil, Mexico and Thailand.

The MacDonald's cataract

When he retired, Govindappa Venkataswamy, an Indian doctor, took a trip to the United States and was very impressed by the efficiency of MacDonald's, which sold cheap, hot meals on every street corner. These meals must have been rather good since there were always queues in front of the restaurants (since he is a vegetarian, he was not able to test this last factor for himself).

He went back to India with the idea of developing the same level of efficiency to work in the struggle against eye cataracts, a disease caused by old-age and food deficiency which is particularly prevalent in developing countries. India has nine million blind people, 80 % due to cataracts even though this condition can be cured surgically.

Govindappa Venkataswamy created a small hospital with eleven beds and devised a method which enabled operations to take place much more quickly (the operation time was cut from forty-five to fifteen minutes). Importantly, he invented an original economic model : the more well-off patients paid a price which included a margin of 40 % , whereas those who were less well-off paid the cost price. The operation was free for the poorest people.

Despite the great speed with which this network developed, there was a problem with the supply of intra-ocular lenses. In the beginning, these lenses, which sold for three hundred and fifty dollars a pair, were provided free by important American laboratories. This altruism reached its limit when demand greatly increased : the laboratories stopped providing the lenses. David Green, a Californian entrepreneur and hospital sponsor, contacted former researchers and succeeded in replicating the method for making lenses without copying the patents. Opposite the hospital, he created a factory which makes lenses for four dollars a pair. This company, Aurolab, has become the second largest lens producer in the world and is present in hundreds of countries.

Currently, the Aravind Eye Hospital consists of five hospitals and multiple mobile hospital units which go out to villages to examine people : buses drive patients to town for the operation and take them back to their villages two days later. More than one million patients are examined every year and three hundred thousand have operations. Often, those involved are old people who are looked after by young people. Once they find their sight, they become independent and are able to function normally again, and subsequently the young people can return to school.

Finally, gains in productivity are not to the detriment of quality. The WHO (World Health Organisation) has recognised this network as a world centre of expertise in eye diseases, and Japanese, American and even Canadian surgeons come here to train.

Powerlight

Faced with a boom in energy consumption and diminishing petrol resources, renewable energy offers a very important development potential. Powerlight, an American company that is the leader in solar roofs, has been listed over the past five years among five hundred companies registering the strongest growth. The cost of solar energy still remains high but because of its industrialised production, and the increase in the price of carbon-derived energy, it will become increasingly profitable.

However, what is really at stake appears to be a decrease in consumption. Germany is one of the countries at the forefront of wind-generated energy. This form of energy provides 3 % of the electricity consumed nationally, which is just what household appliances consume when they are on stand-by...

The Rocky Mountain Institute

According to the American researcher Amory Lovins, the profitability of the 'negawatt', in other words, the person who does not consume electricity, is a great deal more than each additional watt. He proved this in the 1980s by building a 'bio climatic' architectural model which is the headquarters of his research institute, the Rocky Mountain Institute. Situated in the heart of Colorado, a region whose temperatures can drop to as low as - 20°C in winter and 30°C in summer, this building does not have either a heating system or air-conditioning. The stone walls are very thick, a large greenhouse with triple glazing traps the heat during the summer, a dual air circulation during the winter heats the in-coming air, and in the summer cools the out-going air. In total, the electricity consumption is ten times less than in an ordinary building. Amory Lovins claims that if he were to construct this building today, it would be twenty times less.

Some of the most recently buildings using these methods produce more energy than they consume, particularly because of their solar roofs. The surplus of energy can then be sold to other people. Germany already has more than six thousand of these so-called 'positive' houses. In the knowledge that energy consumption in France related to buildings represents between 30 and 40 % of our total energy consumption and that we lag behind in terms of bio-climatic construction, our room for manoeuvre in this sector is enormous.

Scandic Hotel

Jan Peter Bergkvist was appointed head of the Scandic Hotel company in the 1990s. Following the Gulf War, which had had a very negative effect on tourism, this chain of about one hundred and fifty hotels went through a very difficult period. The new manager's reaction was unusual. The main thrust of his strategy to reorganise the company was centred around sustainable development. Instead of turning to consultants, he turned to the five thousand employees of the group. Using a training programme intended to present them with the principles of sustainable development, he proposed that they invent the ideal hotel.

Here are some of the examples taken from among the two thousand ecological innovations which they proposed and which were implemented : replacing the small personal soap bars wrapped in paper with wall-fixed liquid soap dispensers ; making sure that the curtains do not cover the radiators ; keeping the temperature of unoccupied rooms at 16°C and creating a computer system which only turns on the heating in the room when the client registers at the front desk, appreciating that the time taken for the client to walk from the front desk to his room is sufficient for the temperature to rise from 16 to 19°C ; replacing the carpets made from petrol derivatives with wood floors made from sustainable managed forests ; sorting waste ; and so on.

These measures represented an investment of two hundred thousand Euros which resulted in savings of two million Euros over the first five years, both in terms of energy and in terms of consumables. The business started registering a profit again at the end of three years. It was floated on the stock exchange and the share demand exceeded the offer eight times over. It was bought by Hilton who appointed Jan Peter Bergkvist as its head of sustainable development for the whole group.

Eliminating the concept of waste

Our civilisation can take pride in the fact that it invented a concept which did not exist naturally – waste ! Overall, we produce one thousand tonnes of waste per second. According to the American designer William McDonough, we should not place filters in factory chimneys and air vents but in the heads of designers so that they devise a way of dealing with waste.

To make his point, he specifies three product categories. The first category groups together products which are entirely consumable and therefore do not generate any waste : for example, it is possible to make carpets from entirely biodegradable, plant-based materials.

The second category includes durable products, in other words, products which we can recycle indefinitely. 95 % of the parts in Rank Xerox photocopiers come from old photocopiers. One buys the service that the machine provides and not the materials which constitute the machine. It is therefore in Rank Xerox's interest to make parts which are capable of lasting a very long time, since each time a part breaks, it has to be replaced and this represents a significant cost.

The third category are products which are 'unsellable'. Today, numerous products on sale are harmful both to the environment and to human health. There is no other solution than to refuse to make them or use them.

The bio-plastic revolution

The Metabolix company was founded by the researcher Olivier Peoples and is associated with an important American agricultural producer. It produces plant-based plastics which are entirely degradable and are made from sugar and a bacterium. The company owns this patent. It should be stressed that with regards to biodegradability, many plastics which bear the word 'biodegradable' contain a molecule which breaks them up and thereby makes them disappear to the naked eye, but in fact this does not make them any easier to be assimilated naturally. Metabolix's plastics are truly assimilated. They do not undergo any modification in a sterile environment (such as in a refrigerator) but once they are buried in the earth, an environment which is saturated with microbes, they are assimilated by bacteria within thirty days.

This is a real revolution which chemists take very seriously. The chairman and managing director of Dupont at Nemours announced to his researchers that by 2010, he wanted one quarter of the group's production to be plant-based.

Recycling chlorinated solvent

Chlorinated solvent is a chemical product for cleaning metal parts which are stained with grease. It is essential for parts used in safety systems (such as airbags, aeroplane security, etc), but it is a real poison as far as the environment is concerned. In the beginning of the 1990s in Germany, the Green Party launched a campaign to outlaw its use. Karl Stutzle, the chairman and managing director of Safechem in Düsseldorf, was faced with a dilemma common to many manufacturers : he was personally very sensitive to questions concerning the environment, but he was under professional pressure, if he wanted to keep his job and feed his family, to continue making a product which is a major pollutant.

He realised that the products he sold his customers was more like a service (cleaning metal parts) than a product (chlorinated solvent), and he adopted a new business model in which he provided the service while still salvaging and recycling 92 % of the chlorinated solvent. The remaining 8 % is treated in a much safer fashion by his company than by his customers who used to throw it away indiscriminately. This model allowed him to reduce the volume of products used by a factor of ten, and to increase his turnover substantially. Today, members of the Green Party publicise this company. Safechem has become the leader in its market and Dow Chemical, of which it is a subsidiary, now sends Karl Stutzle to 'spread the word' about this in the group's other subsidiaries.

Duck power

Takao Furuno is a Japanese rice producer. Having read one of the founding works of global ecology, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), he decided to stop using pesticides and fertilisers. For two years, he weeded his fields using a hoe, but he found it exhausting. He noticed ducks paddling in a paddy field on an old engraving, and it intrigued him. He was

keen to try this out and introduced ducks to his paddy-fields and noticed that they left the rice alone (a study would later show that there is too much starch for them in rice), but they devoured the weeds and the insects. Their excrement served as a fertiliser for the paddy-field and the movement of their webbed feet oxygenated the water, which resulted in higher yields.

Takao Furuno decided to introduce ducks to his paddy-fields. Not only did he no longer have any fertiliser and pesticide expenses, but his yield increased by 30 %. He was also able to sell part of the ducks and fish which he breeds in the water which is now unpolluted, a fact which allows him to diversify his revenues. Today his book, *The power of duck : integrated rice and duck farming*, is a best-seller among books specialising in Japanese agriculture, and more than ten thousand Japanese farms have followed his example.

Reconnecting man with nature

The common factor which I see in all these initiatives is the reconnection of man with fellow man and of man with nature. In the face of the changes which are currently visible in the world, these entrepreneurs recreate social ties, economic systems, and material life-cycles and energy cycles.

The lesson we have learned from our trip was that there are no miracle solutions to all the challenges which confront the planet. On the other hand, there exists a miracle mentality which is well illustrated by the story of Neil Armstrong. On July 20th 1969, when Armstrong walked on the moon, he noticed the Earth and remarked that it was a small blue ball suspended in the middle of infinity and yet terribly finite itself : it was not connected to any pipe either for supplies from anywhere or to get rid of its waste.

Man is capable of achieving incredible feats – to think that there were only sixty years between the Wright brothers' first flight and Man's first step on the moon. These exploits may endanger the planet. However, man is also capable of appreciating this danger and finding the solutions which will enable us to respond to these challenges.

DISCUSSION

The politicians' role

Question : *How can one influence public decisions globally given these assessments and examples of solutions that you have discussed ?*

Mathieu Le Roux : Our initiative interested many people... but not the politicians. It is a fact that our message is very company-oriented and leaves relatively little room for MPs to act except that the mayor of Curitiba managed to reduce energy consumption in his town by 40 %. However, the role of politicians is as crucial as that of entrepreneurs. People's reactions depend on two things : desire and fear. In our book, we wanted to make people imitate these entrepreneurs, and many young people have written to us to declare their desire to innovate in order to see progress in sustainable development. The other factor, fear, comes from politicians. It is their job to make laws to ban polluting products, for example.

When one sees the ways in which our lifestyles have changed in the 20th century, one realises that this change has generally been achieved by initiatives taken by entrepreneurs supervised by politicians. Everyone, therefore, has a role to play. The other role of politicians is to create incentives. When new products or services which have to be implemented in the public interest do not appear to be profitable in the immediate future, it is up to the politicians to make them profitable until the market adopts them and pays the fair price.

Q. : *You have not placed much emphasis on the social economy, and yet many social innovations come from this sector.*

M. L. R. : We have mentioned the case of several NGOs that have changed their model and have changed themselves into companies in order to perpetuate the business model. For example, in Bangladesh we met a woman who created a network of crèches in textile factories. She succeeded in convincing the managers that their employees would be happier, take less time off and be more efficient if their children were cared for properly. She started off by founding a crèche ; today, she sells her advice to heads of companies.

Fairy stories ?

Q. : *It is very pleasant to listen to your stories but they are merely ethereal ; they have the same charm and dramatic lack of reality as fairy stories. You attribute a great deal of power to politicians, but most of their time is spent avoiding catastrophes. Even Jean-Louis Borloo (current French Employment minister), who produced miracles as mayor of Valenciennes, must have been paralysed with horror when he opened his files when he became a Minister. As for your stories about companies, they remind me of stories which are to be found in Tom Peters' book In search of excellence. Two years after its publication, two thirds of the companies he cited had gone bankrupt. Closer to home, thousands of start-ups were created from so-called 'great ideas', and disappeared when the Internet bubble burst. It is not ideas that make a company successful, but paying attention to minutiae. Gérard Mulliez, the owner of Auchan (large French hypermarket chain), said 'A company has two thousand details to put right every day. When you have settled one thousand eight hundred, you are losing money. At one thousand nine hundred, you are at the break-even point. To earn money, you have to put right at least one thousand nine hundred and fifty.' This is why I am deeply sceptical about success stories which started out as great ideas.*

M. L. R. : The companies in which we were interested had all already been in existence for between ten and fifteen years and it had taken us up to ten years of preparation and many abortive attempts to achieve a result. Muhammad Yunus is certainly also faced with two thousand details to put right every day. He does not differ from traditional entrepreneurs by *how* he does things – he is a real entrepreneur and he knows how to increase his business – but by *why* : he is carried along by a fabulous ideal namely 'making poverty history'.

Should one be sceptical about this political activism and think that it is naïve ? In my philosophy classes, I learned the quotation by Alain '*Thinking is saying no*'. I suppose that this expression was justified at the time of the Resistance. However, it has the disadvantage of creating a false syllogism : '*If thinking is saying no, saying no is perhaps thinking and if in doubt, it is best not to agree and that way I will appear to be intelligent*'. This is how every good idea comes up against criticism and denial initially...

The entrepreneurs I describe are people who have asked themselves not only *why* but also those who, once they identified the solution, showed themselves to be capable of dealing with the *how*. Gary Hirschberg is the founder of a company which makes biological yoghurt and has become the fourth largest producer of yoghurt in the United States. His company has just been bought by Danone. Behind his scatter-brained exterior hides an exceptional manager, I can assure you, as the bottom line of his balance sheet proves.

An 'ordinary' story

Q. : *When one listens to your account, one is tempted to think that these adventures are reserved for exceptional managers. I work for Danone and I am happy that you cited Gary Hirschberg who is an inspiration for us. However, I also want to give you the example of the director of our South African subsidiary. He is French and he had his first professional experience in Austria. Nothing predisposed him to become a particularly innovative entrepreneur. He was faced with the impossible situation of developing our sales because in South Africa our traditional products only appealed to 10 % or 20 % of the population. A further problem is that there are still very few refrigerators in South Africa.*

Therefore, he asked our R&D laboratories to develop products which were cheaper than our traditional products and which had a formula which allowed them to be kept longer. To distribute these products, he recruited the 'Danino Ladies'. Each lady was given a trolley and went into the townships to sell these products at one Rand each, in other words, very cheaply.

This system allowed us to distribute high quality food products and to create jobs. It is a small, 'ordinary' revolution of which we are rather proud.

Q. : *For a long time, we opposed capitalism and sustainable development, yet examples such as this one show that we are capable of earning money in an activity which is a social good. This is good news because it is the search for profits which leads the world and not selfless generosity which is on show Sunday morning after Mass ...*

Can we change the world ?

Q. : *You assert that the aim of the entrepreneurs you cite is to reinstate the poor into the economy. I think that they would rather create an alternative economy. They want to change the world.*

M. L. R. : *Certainly, some of them have a project to change the world, like David Green who said to us 'There are two worlds : the one which we know, and the other real world which I will show you and in which I created my company.' But I think that it is only a way of presenting things. In reality, these entrepreneurs had a stroke of genius in turning the system on itself and using the fabulous lever of the economy to generate something other than just profit.*

Q. : *A short time after May 1968, Alfred Sauvy gathered some students in his country house and suggested that they spend a week of their time 'rebuilding France'. He suggested that their starting point was what they did not want to call into question and that they should keep to one side the means necessary for this : this represented 98 % of the available resources. There was only 2 % of the national budget left for innovation.*

Q. : *This talk reminds me of the theory of Zeno of Elea (a Greek philosopher) which explained that movement was impossible. Diogenes proved that movement was possible by walking. Our libraries are full of theories claiming that it is impossible to change anything. The case studies which you have presented show us that the opposite is the case and I would like to thank you for this.*

M. L. R. : *When one launches oneself into this sort of initiative, one expects that one will meet people who will repeatedly say 'it can't work', and they may even be ready to put a spoke in your wheel, since the success of this type of project upsets them.*

Q. : *It remains to be seen whether there are enough entrepreneurs of the sort which you describe to carry out ideas for sustainable development. Are they not the few trees which hide the forest ?*

M. L. R. : *Time will tell if these eighty entrepreneurs and those who are like them are the beginnings of a revolution or not. But if this is not the case, then we are dead ! Additionally, we should ask ourselves how we train entrepreneurs. One of my professors at HEC (business school) used to repeat 'Push people into the water, and they will learn to swim.' I am not sure that this is the best solution any more than explaining to them the movements for the breaststroke on a blackboard. I strongly believe in teaching someone to swim by showing him how others have managed to do so, and by making him want to try.*

Q. : *Should we not pursue the research which you have led, on a global scale, in France ? This would bring us hope that, even in France, things are possible, and it would be very useful to change the way people think and develop the miracle mentality which you mentioned.*

M. L. R. : *The book mentions a few French people such as Maria Nowak, an ecodesigner and founder of a fair-trade brand. Personally, I work in a management consultancy which tries hard to contribute to this change in mentality. I am now in the process of devising a project*

for a television programme, but I am hugely inexperienced in this area, and any advice or suggestions would be very welcome !

Presentation of the speaker :

Mathieu Le Roux : graduate of the HEC (*Hautes Etudes Commerciales*) Business School, specialising in entrepreneurship. He took part in publishing as well as film and communications projects for his School and he has worked in innovation consultancy, the Internet, and marketing in France, the United States (with Pascal Baudry) and Brazil. Having read a book by Muhammad Yunus (the founder of the first bank using the system of micro-credit), Mathieu Le Roux decided to make entrepreneurs aware of sustainable development. He is the co-founder of the project entitled *Tour du Monde en 80 Hommes* (Around the World in 80 Men), and author of the book *80 Hommes pour changer le Monde - Entreprendre pour la Planète* (80 Men to change the World – Enterprise for the planet : published by JC Lattès, April 2005). He divides his time between his work as a consultant in sustainable innovation (for the BeCitizen consultancy) and attempting to publicise this new form of enterprise using the media.

Translation by Rachel Marlin (marlin@wanadoo.fr)