

Seniorenkring Wijk aan Zee

To the Senior Group
Killingi Nomme
Estonia

Wijk aan Zee, April 2009

Dear Friends,

Our conference about “Change” is nearing. We have continued working out the themes from our list. Herewith again is a summary of our discussions.

Family life

In the period till 1960 big families in the Netherlands were quite normal and in particular in the catholic part of the population.

Nel: I was one of 4 girls in a family of 8 children. We lived on the skirts of the village. We had an agrarian business. This needed hard work and all of us had to give a hand. That's what has shaped us. There was no television in those days and in the evenings we were together chatting about sport, the boys played cards and the girls did needlework. That was sociable.

For a long time birth control was taboo in catholic circles, because it was not allowed by church doctrine. A big family demands a lot of organization, care and attention of the parents.

Nel: When I married I got 6 children in a fairly short time. My husband died and I carried on with a widower left with 5 children. Thus we had a family of 13 persons. The children were in the age of 6 to 14 years. We gave them all a task through which they all have become quite independent.

In the sixties a change came: the contraceptive pill was introduced and also in the catholic part of the population, parents took their own responsibility in birth control. The families got smaller and family life changed as well.

Nel: In the early years family life happened in the living room, now upstairs in the bedroom. The introduction of television, computer and mobile phone causes less mutual contact among the members of the family. Families are not even having meals together. As an emancipated woman I decided what we had for a meal and what had to be done. Now we ask the children: what do you want?

Growing prosperity

After World War II and in the phase of rebuilding the country, prosperity has strongly increased.

One of the most important changes was that more and more people were able to buy a house.

Jaap: When I married in 1957 it was not possible to buy a house of our own. We lived in with my parents; the living room was parted in two by sliding doors. We lived on good terms with my parents but our ideal was to buy a house of our own.

In 1961 new houses were built in Wijk aan Zee. With the help of a mortgage, some savings and the help of my employer I could afford to buy. We still live in this house. Later on we modernized it.

Possessing a house is stimulated through all kinds of regulations. Value of the houses has strongly increased and this brought prosperity for the older generations. Yet it does mean that younger people cannot get a house so easily.

Jaap: The value of my house has so strongly increased, that we could help our two sons to buy a house. I could completely pay off my mortgage.

House property is one of the elements of increased prosperity. Having a car, going out for a meal in a restaurant, holidays and air tours has ever since been possible for many groups of people. Our group was asked to tell in one word what prosperity has brought us: freedom, the feeling of being spoiled, an easy living, being able to go where you want to, health, gratitude, careless existence, time for yourself, satisfaction, independence.

General conclusion: the issue is not only about welfare but above all about well-being.

Industrial life

In trade and industry many changes have occurred.

Frans: my first job was at an (also internationally) well-known chocolate and cake factory of Verkade and later on at the tinning-factory of Docter in Beverwijk. There was good-fellowship. At Verkade I learned to know my present wife. At Docter's you had the feeling of working with and for each other. The distance between the managing directors and the employees was short. You spoke of "Mister Jan" and "Mister Piet".

The Netherlands have always been internationally orientated. As a small country we always had to earn your money abroad. In our home country big construction jobs were completed and this resulted in ever and again bigger industries.

Frans: I worked for a building contractor van Hattum en Blankevoort that cooperated in the Deltaworks (protection against the rising sea) and carried out assignments everywhere in the world especially at the harbours. Our company amalgamated with an other big building contractor but that resulted in a financial disaster. Haughtiness, pursuit of gain and wanting more and more led to loss of general view and mismanagement.

Growth of industries does not only lead to problems with management. Good-fellowship will be in danger too.

Frans: I have always been working in family businesses. There still is a personal relationship and a clear own business culture. A reason for loss of good-fellowship is the changing work processes: through modern techniques it's going to be all more individual. Where in the early years a group of people worked together, it's now one person who's doing the job.

Hygiene and health care

In the field of personal hygiene many changes have occurred. All kinds of memories arise in our group.

Bets: Once a week we took a bath in a zinc tub of water in the kitchen and then we got clean underwear. Sometimes we went to the local public bath house in Beverwijk. Washing yourself did you daily with the water tap or the pump. In many houses outside the cities was no running water. You used rain water from the well or a pump. The WC was mostly outdoors and there was no sewerage.

In the sixties Wijk aan Zee was connected to the main sewerage. Also thanks to subsidy of the government it was stimulated that there was a shower in every house. Health care in Wijk aan Zee was limited.

Bets: We had our local medical doctor, a well known appearance on a bicycle and a nurse to tend the people. We swallowed whale liver-oil during the winter and cleaning teeth was not found necessary.

Now there is a lot of attention for health and hygiene, yet sometimes a bit too much. Because people wash themselves too many times nowadays, a dry skin has to be treated all kinds of means. We have profoundly changed our food pattern.

Already for more than tens of years Wijk aan Zee has an important health institute: Heliomare.

Bets: When Tuberculosis was still an endemic disease, a sanatorium was built near the fresh air of the sea. The patients lied in the open air on the terraces. When TBC disappeared as an endemic disease it turned a rehabilitation centre. It is nationally known and a special feature is that the "rollator", which is now an important help for the elderly, has been invented in Heliomare.

The progress of medical knowledge has had enormous consequences. Now it's possible to execute all kinds of transplantations, to replace limbs. Prolonged stay in hospital is becoming more and more seldom. Operations, in early times difficult and risky, for example cataract, have become routine.

Till so far the short summaries of our discussions. We hope that you will get an impression of things that happened in Wijk aan Zee. We are obliged to tell you more about it in our conference in June.

From the booklets, Mari Akron gave us, we have made a summary in Dutch of the most important points of history of Estonia. Through this we are having some background knowledge, but of course we are anxious to learn about your personal experiences in relation to the severe developments in your country.

Friendly regards from Wijk aan Zee.