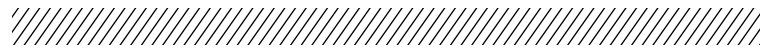


39. Laurent Minguet



Sustainable
Development
Entrepreneur



As soon as the subject of sustainable development comes up, Laurent Minguet is inexhaustible. The multiple company director, who celebrates his 52nd birthday this summer, has never failed to express himself on the subject over the past few years, a few examples are: the book (9 milliards, Editions Luc Pire, 2008), his blog www.nowfuture.org or press articles. Laurent Minguet diffuses his ideas and does not hesitate to take on the feature of a militant to defend them with politicians. But you soon notice that the first part of the Liège-born is above all that of the entrepreneur: after acquiring EVS with Pierre Lhoest in 1994, and the success of hard disc recorders for slow motions and replays developed by the company, Laurent Minguet has not stopped in multiplying the creation of companies. Since 2004, his activities at the sustainable development level have increased and he became associated with several active companies or associations for the launch of Horizon Pléiades, a real estate promotion group specialised in low energy buildings, ATS, a company that installs thermal solar panels, Green Invest, third party-investor in biomass heating and electric power production, or Coretec, a research agency specialised in cogeneration, heat networks and biomass boilers.

I am an entrepreneur to the core: I like to resolve the problems that surround us.

////////////////////

Reading his CV inevitably raises the following question: how did that civil engineer physicist who worked in the oil sector at the beginning of his career finally chose this direction? Answer: despite appearances the EVS adventure is the key to this unusual path... "In 1984, at Pétrofina, I was bored. I was hired by EVS. Then in 1992, EVS went bankrupt, I hesitated to stay. At the time I met a guy who dealt with low energy houses and who explained that by building differently the energy consumption is 3 times less. I liked the idea. But I decided to stay and even to take over EVS. Turns out I did the right thing: that company gave me the financial means and the necessary experience for



© Laurent Minguet - Horizon Pléiades

developing entrepreneurship. I felt like reinvesting because I am an entrepreneur to the core: I like to resolve the problems that surround us.”

It is therefore quite natural that Laurent Minguet made the sustainable energy sector the focus of his investments. But he is not satisfied with the role of financier: he gets involved as much as he can to share his particular future vision. “You often hear that sustainable development means tightening your belt, consuming less, lowering the temperature in the living room and wearing a sweater. I call that sustainable under-development. My vision is rather more optimistic. Some say that 3 or 4 planets would be needed to continue living in our current comfort. For me, on the contrary, it is possible for 9 billion people to live in more comfort and not only 1.2 billion Westerners, by applying a range of renewable energy production technologies. The Earth receives 6.000 times more solar energy than it consumes each year!”

Pragmatical, Laurent Minguet bases each project on an evaluation which balances both the environmental factors and economic criteria, even shaking up some ideas if needed. “We are often told that the best energy is the non-consumed one. That’s absolutely wrong. We have decided not to make passive houses, but houses with very low energy, based on this calculation: our houses consume 3 litres equivalent in oil fuel by m² by year. But, today, in Belgium, 1 litre of the most expensive oil fuel heat costs a bit less than 1 euro. If those buildings are improved in such a way that they only consume 1.5 litre, and thus corresponding to the passive norm, this creates an additional cost of 100 € by m². Is it rational to invest 100 € per square metre to save 1.5 l, i.e. 1.5 €/year? No! Is it better for the environment? No, if I use renewable energy which is profusely available. You need to make an overall calculation.”

Tireless communicator, Laurent Minguet considers that one of the obstacles to the change comes from a lack of knowledge. “That’s why, even in situations where it is

profitable to change to renewable energy, an incentive is needed.” However, he thinks that the incentive bonuses for the installation of photovoltaic panels are disproportionate: “The installation yields 3 times more than it costed over 15 years. It’s extravagant. Even if it would yield 20% it would already be great.” The businessman got involved in third party investing which he regards as a true key to change. Focusing both on the present and the future, Laurent Minguet calculates and reasons, but also works on impulse and encounters. After going to Senegal on invitation of his childhood friend Jean-Paul Fontaine, he has started new projects in that country since 2003. “Cap Skirring, in Casamance, is a sort of laboratory where nice sustainable development projects can be achieved quite quickly: everything remains to be done there!” That is how BES was created, the Wood Energy Senegal project through which Laurent Minguet provides the electricity for a small village with photovoltaic panels while inciting the inhabitants to plant 50 acres of wood which will yield - in 4 years - more or less 20.000 euros a year. “On the one hand, the autonomous electricity production enables the village population to use more accessible, much cheaper and much more ecological electricity than that produced elsewhere in the country and based on oil. As an example, charging a mobile phone will cost them 200 times less than today, or 5 CFA francs instead of 1.000. On the other hand, planting wood will enable them to pay for the service while having at their disposal financial means to fund other projects: sending children to school, buying medication, going to the dentist... Their needs are greater than ours, but people are quickly satisfied!”

The Earth receives 6.000 times more solar energy than it consumes each year!

////////////////////////////////////

But will that “social business” survive when the wood energy market reaches its full development? Laurent Minguet thinks that Senegal will not encounter problems with this



market for centuries to come. “Because not only is the Western world hungry for renewable energies, it can produce a lot more than it consumes. But also because the renewable energy market is not a fragile market like the cotton market. Wood grows at its own rate: the evolution of its price is stable.” To those who say that importing African wood in Belgium for energy production is bewildering, Laurent Minguet replies: “It makes sense to produce bio fuel in Senegal, whereas in my opinion it makes no sense in the Walloon Region where land is too precious and can produce food. The total balance of a partnership Wallonia – food production, and Senegal – renewable energy production, is best for both sides.”

Tireless communicator, Laurent Minguet considers that one of the obstacles to the change comes from a lack of knowledge.

////////////////////////////////////

His confident approach does not prevent Laurent Minguet from learning lessons when his projects are faced with problems. “Oasis Boucotte, our second project in Senegal, an organic vegetables production, was a bit of a false good idea. The aim was to produce locally for local consumption, but it was only possible during a short tourism period: production was possible from January and the tourism season ends in April! “Since then, the project focuses on non-transportable products with high added value: magnificent strawberries produced in February, that all the hotels buy by the dozens of kilos.”



Whether you agree with his ideas or not, Laurent Minguet does not leave indifferent and has the gift of inciting reflection, dynamism.

There is a lot to do, because today we are at 10% of renewable energy, and by the end of the century - whether you like it or not - we must reach 100% of renewable energy.

////////////////////////////////////

A movement he considers urgent: “What needs to be optimised, by investment, is not only energy, but grey cells too, i.e. our capabilities to develop a different, sustainable world! There is a lot to do, because today we are at 10% of renewable energy, and by the end of the century - whether you like it or not - we must reach 100% of renewable energy.”

•

Isabelle Masson for REcentre
Interviewee /
Laurent Minguet, Entrepreneur

www.nowfuture.org