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Speaker 2

Hello On The Way, my name's Hortense Harang, and I'm the co-founder of We Trade Local and Fleurs d'Ici. So the central theme of my career has been the greater good. All the jobs I've done relate to that, and public service, in a certain way, even though I've never actually been a civil servant, but that's it, there's this idea about how you can serve the community and the greater good.

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Speaker 2

So I began my career as a journalist, but not just for any media, I worked for the BBC. My mission was to educate populations all around the world, to try to contribute to making sure that everyone is well-informed, and citizens are able to make the most objective and positive decisions possible. So that's how I began my career, and then I moved on to consulting, after a short time.

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Speaker 2

Working in politics too, which was another type of job that in a way was about the greater good, advising some fairly major actors, such as Carrefour, for example, which at the time was the leading private employer in France, and you're able to suggest actions that benefit employees, notably at Carrefour, which had a fairly mainly female workforce, who weren't always all that well off, and who sometimes had rather complex family situations.

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Speaker 2

And you're able to make suggestions to them, such as setting up crèches at hypermarkets, that sort of thing, it was a way of serving society, that I really liked. And today, running an impactful business is also a way of working towards the transformation of society, and again, towards the greater good.

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Speaker 2

We are a business with a mission and we have a new business status, which means that we are committed to serving the greater good, the first goal being supporting local agriculture, and the second being supporting local businesses. [We do it] by setting up local distribution schemes, so as to be able to scale up the movement towards short distribution chains, because as you know, nowadays consumers are demanding local products.

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Speaker 2

But, currently, local products only account for less than 7% of traded volumes. And contrary to popular belief, it's not because of production or price, it's really about ease of access to local production. So when you're calling yourself the Amazon of short distribution chains, it's quite divisive because Amazon doesn't only have friends, and that's for a good reason.

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Speaker 2

But still, it comes with that ambition for scale, in fact, and also for the impact of transformation, because, like it or not, Amazon has transformed people's lives, though not always for the better. But there you go, we'd like to have the same sort of impact, but for the better. In 2015, I was working in an organisation called the World Innovation Summit for Education, which is thought to be the largest global summit on issues about innovation, about education, about how we're preparing future generations to know how to be, rather than know how to do, because in fact you don't not really know what children's jobs are going to be,

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Speaker 2

kids who are five years old today, what are they going to be doing at twenty, in fifteen years' time. And in that ecosystem there, in fact I met the first social entrepreneurs there, and it was through meeting with those entrepreneurs, for example Frédéric Bardeau from Simplon, people like that, people who have strong business projects, so for-profit, they're not charitable associations, but still they're serving the greater good, and the world of transforming society in a positive way.

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Speaker 2

And for me, that ticks all the right boxes. I think you have to stand on your two feet, and the economic impact of a company has to be supported by social impact, and vice versa, meaning that you're really standing on your own two feet, and that's not a contradiction, but in fact it's complementary, because in our case, the first sector that we developed was the flower sector.

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Speaker 2

The more people buy flowers local and seasonal flowers from us, the more the impact is multiplied, the lower the carbon impact is, and so on. And all the positive effects are multiplied as our turnover grows. I'm a great believer in that virtuous knock-on effect. So it was in that context that I was first exposed to these models.

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Speaker 2

And it was really the trigger that allowed me to project myself into this ecosystem, and to say to myself that yes, carrying out a business project, an impactful company, at the time for me was the right way of acting in the service of society. My partner and I chose to tackle the question of shortened supply chains, as we both grew up in families that were quite concerned with issues relating to nature.

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Speaker 2

My name's Hortense, and as you'll have noticed, the name Hortense comes from Latin, "hortus", which means "garden", so that's going to have some sort of effect on you! And my partner's name is Chloé, and that means young shoot. So that's pretty funny, as we're a start up. So there you go, I think there was a certain familial atavism effect, an appetite for asking how you could match up consumption in harmony with nature, and respect nature and society.

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Speaker 2

And human beings, of course, but really, with both of us having that awareness, which again I think was inherited from our family ecosystems. Why do people eat tomatoes in winter? What on earth is giving roses on Valentine's Day all about? Well, because after all we had, even though we live in cities, we're still aware that there are seasons, and it seems pretty crazy to have the same products from January 1st, right through until December the 31st.

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Speaker 2

You can still find the same things on sale. And that seemed pretty strange to us, and so we ended up with this project, in fact because we didn't actually know each other. It was really, how can I put it? Having this shared desire to ask how we could bring some sense back into the way people consume, and, most of all, by questioning the "why",

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Speaker 2

We got to that point. And why? It was because there was no moral judgment about what people do. It's more about the question. I mean, how has it's become easier now to buy garlic from Argentina, than garlic grown twenty kilometres from your where you live? That idea's pretty strange. In the end it's a bit counter-intuitive when you think about it, as everyone wants to consume things that are produced nearby, so they should be cheaper, because the cost of transport and so on should make them cheaper.

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Speaker 2

And so, as we both had backgrounds in mass distribution, we naturally looked at the question of organisation. Basically at how supply chains are organised, and so on, to try to find out where the problem was, and to try and understand why the market has structured itself that way. And we started in one sector in particular, which was the flower sector.

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Speaker 2

Why? Because the flower sector is really emblematic of exactly that sort of unbridled globalisation that makes it cheaper to purchase garlic from Argentina, than garlic from 20 kilometres away. Which, again, is pretty weird. So, currently, 85% of flowers are imported from developing countries. Everyone thinks of Holland.

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Speaker 2

But in fact, Holland is just a hub. Today, flowers are produced mainly in countries located on the equator, so that's Kenya, Colombia, Ecuador, and Ethiopia. And after that, they transit via Holland, and then they're re-dispatched. All that means a lot of carbon emissions, as they're transported by plane, as they're still a fresh and fragile product.

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Speaker 2

So even if they get treatments that may alter them a little bit just so they can withstand transport, it's still a really strange supply chain. If you think about it, there are a lot of intermediaries and so on. And so we asked ourselves how could we make things simpler again.

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Speaker 2

So how do you simplify the supply chain and re-localise it? And in fact the answer to that is by going digital. Going digital actually makes it possible to consolidate volumes, because the reason why it's easier and in fact it's cheaper to import garlic from Argentina is because there are very large volumes, and it's big flows.

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Speaker 2

And big flows mean not too many exchanges, not too much friction, not too much exchange of information, not too much logistical organisation, and so on. It's big producers dealing with big distributors. Doing local business, it's not the same thing at all. You have to be able to work with lots of small producers, so being able to collect volumes by aggregating communities of producers, on the one hand, and communities of distributors on the other.

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Speaker 2

And with just a piece of paper, a pencil, or even an Excel file, it doesn't work, in fact, you need to manipulate information to organise the exchanges and to consolidate differently, which isn't compatible with the old methods. And digital is much criticised, and it isn't always used to build a more virtuous society. But as a player in what's called "tech for good", meaning tech in the service of the greater good, we believe that, on the contrary, it's a factor in reconstructing more virtuous supply chains, while still guaranteeing quality of service and accessibility,

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Speaker 2

for a seamless user experience. It's all about this understanding of how you can try and use digital to help rebuild local supply chains. And we thought that the flower sector was a good first example. As I said, flowers are a raw material that's imported, where there's a use case that's pretty glaring.

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Speaker 2

And also it's a product that's also quite attractive, which makes it possible to get the attention of people, of the media, and so on, and so spread the word. So the first thing we did, and one of the reasons we started with the flower sector, is because it allowed us to raise consumer awareness. Because today it seems obvious.

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Speaker 2

But when we were getting started five years ago, saying local, the importance of local products, was much less well known. And so we started by creating a brand, called Fleur d'Ici, which is the first local and seasonal flower brand, which operates in platform mode. So that means it's ultimately an aggregation of a community of independent florists, so people who are town centre traders, and we try to contribute to the sustainability of their business by bringing them traffic.

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Speaker 2

This allowed us to prime the pump, so that they themselves went out to get supplies from local producers. We started with the phase where we were looking for large contracts from consolidated players like Accor for example, and Korian. People whose needs are spread out throughout the country and who, again for reasons of process and internal organisation, were looking for a single point of contact, but who were able to work locally in all the regions where they're present.

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Speaker 2

So multi-local, but still with one single interlocutor, one single invoice, one single specification, and so on. What we're offering, in the end, is being able to do local, with a form guarantee of the quality of specifications, the design, the artistic direction, and so on, whilst using selected local artisans, and so on. Quite quickly, and also with the accelerating effect of Covid, post-Covid,

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Speaker 2

I think that in particular after the lockdown, I think that the French were very afraid of not having enough to eat, or of going hungry, there was that whole time when people rushed out to the supermarkets, and all of a sudden there was a bit more sustained attention paid to local consumption.

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Speaker 2

So there you go, I think that's an underlying trend anyway. And so we had florists and other people. I'll come back to that, local distributors who came to see us, asking: how can we source local raw materials? So our work has changed somewhat, we've become a sort of digital purchasing centre for local products, serving local distributors.

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Speaker 2

Typical florists from all over France, coming to us and saying that they'd also like to purchase local flowers. We no longer needed to generate attraction for the product, the attraction is there, self-sustaining. But that said, it's hard for them, because people don't know, but often, you'd have a florist in Mont de Marsan, for example, and the only way they can buy the raw materials, i.e. flowers, is from a Dutch wholesaler, even though there's often a flower producer just twenty kilometres away,

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Speaker 2

but that chain, our ability to exchange commercial, financial and logistical flows to local ones, has been completely broken by decades of globalisation. And so that's where we come in, basically by rebuilding those local links between that market place, where local supply meets local demand. And we do it digitally, we're just recreating what's existed physically for millennia.

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Speaker 2

And we're bringing it up to date simply by doing it, and at the same time providing the comfort and the practicality of being able to purchase online via your smartphone at the end of the day, without any additional insecurity, but quite the opposite, by making sure that we have an engaged mindset. So that's how we got started, and today, we're going to be seeing these issues of traceability emerge more and more, and nowadays being able to tell the history of a product from A to Z.

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Speaker 2

When you buy a bouquet on flowers on Fleurs d'Ici, you get a little QR code that you can scan, and you'll see that bouquet. And that's unique, it works bouquet by bouquet. This bouquet was prepared by *this* florist, from *this* variety of flowers, produced by *this* producer, delivered by *this* delivery person, with *these* carbon emissions, and so on. And the new generations of consumers were born with smartphones in their hands.

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Speaker 2

And that's an absolutely crucial part of the act of purchase. In fact, you can see lots of successes, like UCAR, and others. Traceability apps. Today, that's become an essential factor. In the beginning that was coming from young people, but they're changing their parents' expectations, and so on. So today that's not option at all, and that's where you can clearly see that once again, being able to process data in a consolidated way and at scale lets you generate transparency, and so information for consumers. In the flower sector,

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Speaker 2

when we started, 90% of producers had disappeared over the past 50 years. So in 1972, there were around 30,000 flower growers in France. And in 2017, when we started, there were 3,500 left. The good news is that today, thanks to the action of the Slow Flower movement worldwide, the Collectif de la Fleur Française, which is an association that promotes these issues, with all the advocacy work that they've done in that direction.

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Speaker 2

300 new flower farms have been set up over the last five years. 300 new flower farms might seem like a drop in the ocean. But that's still 10% more production capacity. So today you can clearly see that there's an enthusiasm for the professions of flower producers, horticulturists, and for floriculture, there are various names, also, as the flower sector is a high added value product, which can be done in a small space, and so with little investment at the beginning, and on relatively small spaces, that allows for a good work-life balance, not spending your life in the fields, and so that's really a sign

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Speaker 2

that we find very encouraging is that when we started out, a lot of actors who were in the sector before us, and much bigger, told us that it was impossible. That what we were proposing was impossible, and so we completely agreed that we weren't going to go from 85% imported flowers to 100% local flowers overnight, that's for sure.

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Speaker 2

But we're also aware of the fact that a market is something dynamic, and that you shouldn't have a static vision. And for sure, if we'd said in 2017 that it wasn't possible to supply all the demand for flowers in France with French flowers, then we'd have got nothing done. But what we know is that the beauty of the flower sector, unlike other products that are more complex, which take longer, for example, to build out industrial production capacities, relaunching a car factory, that takes a bit longer, or even in textiles.

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Speaker 2

With agricultural production, in three months you can turn things around. You sow, and then three months later you harvest the flowers. That's not everything, but there you go, still you're able to transform production capacities. Personally, I think that the market's a good tool. If there's demand, then there will be supply.

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Speaker 2

And we've seen that, and we're seeing it more and more. That's what's really interesting. People who weren't producing flowers, notably cereal growers supported by the CAP, or dairy farmers who just



couldn't take it anymore for all the French reasons, are looking for growth drivers and new products. And today these people are looking at the flower sector very closely.

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Speaker 2

Why? Because collectively we've demonstrated the fact that there's a demand. And the energy crisis that we've just been through has also meant that French flowers are more appreciated. Why? Because Dutch flowers, notably, are grown in heated greenhouses, lit up 24 hours a day, and so they have enormous energy bills. Today, with French flowers, they're more seasonal flowers, meaning that they're flowers adapted to the cycle of the seasons, and so they grow without needing gas, electricity, and so on, so they're more competitive.

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Speaker 2

What I find encouraging is that situations aren't set in stone, that you can evolve a market, and you just have to prove that consumers are ready for it. And this was the case for flowers. People found it totally abhorrent, when they found out that roses were grown in Kenya, they said they didn't want them anymore, they weren't interested.

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Speaker 2

Giving roses also meant giving carbon somewhere, whereas people thought that they were giving something linked to nature, something very natural. And in fact, they're really artificial. And so it was interesting to see that we were able to change consumption habits and consumer expectations. We often say at Fleurs d'Ici, at We Trade Local, that your credit card is the new voting card.

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Speaker 2

In the end, by making more responsible consumption choices every day, you can influence the course of things, the course of history, the course of the economy, and the course of society. And we've promoted this idea a lot, and we try to do it via educational initiatives, mainly by explaining to people that in fact you can consume differently, and that it's not less good.

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Speaker 2

In fact it's actually better. Red roses in February, for Valentine's Day, is an invention of the flower industry. In the past it was violets, which are in season then. And in February they're also fragrant, unlike

imported red roses which don't have much soul. And so there you go: there are always alternatives in consuming.

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Speaker 2

In fact, consuming locally is not more expensive, contrary to what people might think, nor is it less good, it's just different, and you have to re-learn, because really we have to consume differently. So, for example, for Valentine's Day, you'd be better off giving buttercups, anemones and tulips, which are seasonal flowers, that grow locally in winter. In winter in France people used to eat apples and pears, but it's not boring, eating apples and pears,

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Speaker 2

first of all, there are plenty of varieties. You can reintroduce plenty of them. Well, some of them have disappeared, but we still have the starting seeds. It's just a question of re-appropriating them, and I also remember the cherry season when I was little, and when it was cherry season, it was a real event.

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Speaker 2

It was so nice looking forward to that time. It was a bit like looking forward to Christmas, or Easter. It was that sort of thing that marks the course of life, and stops it being monotonous. But there you go, and I actually think there are a lot of benefits to realigning with the rhythm of the seasons in the way we consume, who needs to eat,

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Speaker 2

what does that mean? I mean we eat the same things, all the time, all year round? You've got all of the same things, all the time. It doesn't make sense. On the contrary, personally I think it's much nicer to have asparagus in April, to have strawberries in May, to have cherries in June, that you have grapes in September.

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Speaker 2

Well, I don't know, myself, I grew up like that and I realise that I'm a bit of a dying breed, although I'm not all that old! Frankly, I think that ultimately there are only benefits in relearning how to consume in this way, and I think people are ready. In fact, I think it's even one of consumers' demands.

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Speaker 2

When we started in the flower market, we said to people that if you want local flowers, the condition is that you're not going to choose all of the time. We do the same thing, you won't always get the same thing, every bouquet is going to be different. It's going to be unique, because we work according to what nature gives us.

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Speaker 2

On the other hand, we guarantee you its size, its price, a certain style, and so on. But that's a reflection about specifications in fact. But they're completely ok with that, they're completely ok with the fact that from the moment you've proven to them that you have a certain know-how, a certain quality, there's no problem.

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Speaker 2

People come with you. Ok, so I'll buy without knowing exactly what I'm going to get. I know roughly, and I'm fine with that, and it turns out they're totally happy to rely on someone else's expertise. So I think this evolution of society, that we're seeing on a daily basis, is really interesting and very encouraging. In fact, for the average consumer, the real obstacle is price.

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Speaker 2

But in fact, as I said earlier, nowadays local goods aren't more expensive, quite the opposite, in fact. Knowing how to buy the right product at the right price at the right time is a skill of a good artisan. And that's why the whole model relies on good artisans. But that said, of course it's trickier to mass-produce products with assembly lines with people who aren't necessarily very well trained, that's harder.

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Speaker 2

Obviously, it's better to have really tightly controlled processes. But if you have tightly controlled processes, you can't adapt to time passing, to passing seasons, the vagaries of the weather, and so on. So there you go, I think the advantage of digital is that it allows us to work on a fragmented basis, fragmented, but at scale. So it's almost Mother's Day, which is an important time for the flower buying.

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Speaker 2

Because there are two important times for flower buying in France: Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. Mother's Day. It's actually a good time this year, at the beginning of June, at the beginning of June there are a lot of local French flowers. And the star flower among those is the peony. It's quite an interesting flower, as it was a flower that was grown alongside fruit trees.

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Speaker 2

In fact, in the past, they were planted together for their shared characteristics, and how they yielded. They were auxiliaries to one another. So the peony's a flower that's been widely reintroduced in France specifically because people stopped selling roses because they were produced in Kenya, and so that's a nice Mother's Day story.

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Speaker 2

Personally, my advice to listeners is to go and ask your florist what local flowers they have, and choose their local flowers. Because you'll see lots of options. And you should find something you like. Well I hope so, anyway! And if not, at least you'll be planting the seed in the mind of your florist, and maybe in future they'll be more inclined to source locally, which is the way forward.

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Speaker 2

So there you go, if there's one thing we can get people to do, it's that. It's to go to your florist and ask, but also more generally when you go to a restaurant, when you're at the greengrocer's, ask them if they know where their products come from, as in principle, for fruits and vegetables, they're obliged,

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Speaker 2

the law says they have to state their origin, but that system's a bit fragmented, and with flowers there's nothing yet. I'm sure something's going to come into force over time. Anyway, you can prepare for that change. You can be part of that change by making a choice, by asking what's available, and choosing local flowers over imported flowers.

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Speaker 2

What's made Fleurs d'Ici a success was our ability to embrace complexity, rather than trying to avoid it. So I mean, to work locally, you have to be able to work with lots of small actors and with small volumes. And that's often a hurdle that people think they can't get over, often due to bias, in fact, due to an idea of the economy, and so on, which was actually totally valid for a time, but that today, with digital, those arguments aren't valid anymore.

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Speaker 2

Today, thanks to digital, you can manage lots of micro flows, and consolidate them differently, you can do logistics without stock, because you can manage data in time real, and so on. And that's the key to success. That's it. So it's about embracing complexity rather than trying to escape it, or avoid it.

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Speaker 2

And thinking about a market in terms of dynamics, it's not always going to be the way it is now, that's how it is and you'll never change it. It's messed up, and it's not going to change, we're stuck with planes, and so on. I think that these days you have to challenge models. Me and my partner, we always ask ourselves the question, three times over: why?

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Speaker 2

When people tell us that something's obvious, they say it'll never work, then we say ok, but... Why? Why? And in fact not many things can stand up to that. Being able to stand up to being asked, three times in a row, the question why? That lets you identify the real hurdles, if there are any, and in fact there aren't all that many.

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Speaker 2

But you have to, you need to have a certain freedom of thinking, and be able to question the sorts of things that are currently taken as givens, things people accept as facts. Local products are too expensive, small volumes don't work. So there are a lot of things people think, who, again,

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Speaker 2

for lots of reasons, that can be explained, that made sense at a certain time, but that can change nowadays. So I think that you shouldn't be shy of applying models that we've seen work in other sectors,

to other sectors. You've got to, in the end it's really about hybridising models and being able to find solutions in a given sector, and then transpose them to another, and so making it work.

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Speaker 2

And being able to generate support, so the ability to advocate, and create communities, I think it's essential these days too, companies have a sort of political, societal, at least, that's also one of the keys to success, I think. The success we've had with our first brand, we created Fleurs d'Ici

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Speaker 2

So today, it has to be able to serve the entire sector, in fact. That's been our project from the start, so that means that in future, anybody, any florist can be able to make a Fleurs d'Ici bouquet. What does that mean? Fleurs d'Ici is going to be a certification in the end, a labelling of bouquets as being produced with local flowers.

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Speaker 2

But in fact that means reconstructing the entire sector upstream. And that's what we did. So that's where we are today. And so for me, all this investment we've made in Fleurs d'Ici, in the end the idea is to benefit the whole industry, and so be able to make sure that you can go to your florist tomorrow, wherever you are in France, and say

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Speaker 2

I'd like a bouquet of Fleurs d'Ici flowers, and that would mean a bouquet of local flowers. So that let us experiment with a lot of things about, as I was saying, local logistics, reconstructing local supply chains, and so on, and going forward, actually right now, in fact, the idea's about being able to apply this model to all products coming from local agriculture, aimed at local businesses.

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Speaker 2

So in fact, in future, you'll be able to go to your favourite restaurant and you'll have dishes labelled "Local Inside", something like that, so you'll be able to know, with all that, this traceability process, to see from what it was produced from, it could be anything, does this chicory come from the producer?

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Speaker 2

That veal, was that produced like this by such and such a producer? And distribution of value too. So there you go, that's the goal, it's really about scaling up this question of short supply chains, and so providing a real alternative to mass distribution, centralising, consolidating, we say "We Trade Local", which is the name of our current company, it's the great re-distribution,

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Speaker 2

it's mass distribution, re-thought differently, with new markers within it, that effectively make it possible to provide more local and more virtuous forms of consumption, but ones that are just as accessible.