

Gerd Leonhard, the thinker who is inspired by Lanzarote to continue designing the future

Leonhard, who has advised large companies, governments and international organizations about the future, highlights in the interview the possibilities of Lanzarote to build a better future for its people and its ecosystems

Gerd Leonhard was born in Bonn and lives in Zurich, but escapes whenever he can to Las Breñas. **He was always interested in the future** and does not forget the impression it caused the first time he saw *Blade Runner* as a child. It was music that catapulted him to fame, since it **predicted the digital revolution of music.**

After 20 albums and 15 years of touring, he decided to write 'The Future of Music', which became one of the best-selling books in numerous languages and in which he advanced the digital revolution of music.

From there, some of the **most important companies in the world** called him **to advise them on the future**, and later, it was governments and international organizations such as the European Commission or the United Nations, which led him to focus on the major issues: climate change, pollution, energy, digitization, artificial intelligence and social justice, among others.

Prestigious international lecturer and author of 5 books, Leonhard is considered by Wired magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in Europe and by the Wall Street Journal as one of the world's leading futurists. Among its differential features, its use of video and new technologies to transmit its messages stands out.



Gerd Leonhard

In an interview with Ekonomus, [Leonhard](#) explains the advantages that Lanzarote has to design a great future for its people.

- **When did your passion for trying to visualize the future begin?**

I was always very interested, even as a child. I remember when I saw *Blade Runner* for the first time. As a musician, I was always interested in the future of music. In the mid-90s when the internet appeared, I had some investor friends, so we set up a series of companies to promote and sell music online. We were part of the first wave of Napster, Mp3.com... before Apple.

At that time it was difficult to market music on mobile phones, there were still no iPhones. There were mp3 players, but the music industry did not dare to market music through them.

In the 90s it had 120 employees doing largely what Spotify does today, but with the crisis of the dot com in 1999 and then on September 11, we had to close. The idea was good, but we had it too soon, 10 years in advance.

- **But it helped him write a book about the future of music...**

Yes, that was in 2004, it took me two years to write it, *The Future of Music*, which became one of the best-selling books in the world. It inspired Spotify and many other companies, one of our main themes in the book was 'music like water'.

The difficult thing was to convince the record companies, who rejected the internet, that they wanted to maintain their monopoly. But Apple arrived and created a device only for music, the iPod, and then the iPhone, with the capacity to have music on your phone easily, safely and cheaply, which managed to convince the record labels.

- **And since then he predicts the future in many other fields...**

People started contacting me, they called me a futurologist and I didn't really know what that word meant, I had simply written a book about the future of music.

The record companies asked me for help, then the film, advertising, publishing, media production companies... For this I created *The Futures Agency*, a work that ended with the pandemic. Now I am not dedicated to business issues, but to global issues such as climate change, artificial intelligence, democracy, energy...

SPANISH Subtitles: The Good Future Film By Futurist Humanist Key...

- **What is your relationship with Lanzarote?**

We had been coming on vacation for 20 years until we decided to buy a house in Las Breñas, where we have friends and where all the Germans of Lanzarote live (laughs).

Las Breñas is a beautiful and quiet place, with very good weather, so we decided to buy a house to come more often and even have an office here.

- **Would you like to work for the governments of the island and the Canary Islands?**

When we were considering moving to the island, I did a lot of research

about Lanzarote and its future, so I would like to work for the island.

I have worked for several governments such as Singapore, Denmark or Switzerland, including the European Commission and the United Nations. Governments have complex problems so they allowed me to focus on the big issues.

I think there is no one in Lanzarote, the Canary Islands or Spain who has assumed leadership to think about the future. There are Americans who do this or Yuval Harari for example, but not here.

- **César Manrique was a great visionary about the future of the island**

Yes, and I think there is a great movement to maintain the figure of César Manrique, but there is no new Manrique. I think that if Lanzarote wants to be in a good position in ten, fifteen or twenty years, some things have to happen.

- **Deadlines are getting shorter...**

Now everything moves at a great speed. The world will change more in the next 10 years than in the previous hundred years.

That's why we have to understand that the future is not science fiction, but that it is here and we are not paying attention to it.

- **Advocates making radical decisions, for example about climate change...**

In the fight against climate change we need emergency decisions and more determined messages to citizens and companies. It is possible that in 20 years we will see important changes in the ocean, and also in the haze, which will be increasingly frequent.

And the other big problem will be climate refugees. It will be impossible to live in North Africa if everything remains the same.

In Lanzarote we cannot change the climate, which is a global issue, but we can prepare ourselves with immediate decisions on smaller issues such as the type of energy we use.

- **Are you in favor of introducing a tourist tax in Lanzarote?**

Absolutely. Some of the measures against climate change do not cost money, such as banning the sale of plastic bags, but others do need financing.

The tourist tax should be proportional to the budget of the visit so that the rich pay more. The rich in the world, 10% of the population, are responsible for 85% of the pollution.

I am working with a German airline to implement a mandatory fee for frequent flyers so that the more you fly, the more you pay, the tourist tax would be the same.

- **How can governments introduce unpopular measures now, but that are good for the future?**

You have to explain the situation and create a good narrative. If you say that we are going to be the leading island in sustainability, in social justice, in digital innovation... if you say that that is the goal and you give it a name and a date there you do have a story.

- **To improve the housing problem, would it be good to prevent the construction of more hotels or the granting of more vacation licenses?**

I think everyone who builds, particularly those who build hotels, should pay what it really costs.

The true cost of building a hotel includes its impact on the climate, water, energy and the social cost of those who work there and where they will stay. Maybe the hotels should build the accommodation of their workers.

- **How long do you think it would take the island, for example, to have 100% of the energy from renewables?**

In 5 or 6 years it could be achieved. But it is primarily a political and budgetary issue.

Lanzarote has a perfect size and a historical reputation for being different and sustainable to resume work in that sense.

- **Social justice is another of the great issues that stands out for the future...**

Yes, make it possible for the local population to balance price growth with income growth.

To improve your income, you must focus on education and digitization. More than university degrees I think that more technical certificates are needed to develop specific skills, for example in digital marketing or sustainable tourism, everyone is doing it, Canada, Finland...

- **Precisely another great axis that stands out for the future is digitization...**

Society has to be digitized to compete. It is necessary for young people to learn programming and understand artificial intelligence. In half a year or a year they can be formed, it is not difficult, nor is there any need to go to Madrid. It can be done here. And if they speak English, they can work for international companies from here.

In addition, an innovation center could be created. Arrecife, for example, could create a tax-free digital zone, without paying rent for two years and with free high-speed internet to attract international companies to the island. It has been done in Thessaloniki, Greece, where there are already 5,000 people working for digital companies that previously had no jobs.

- **Proposes to create an annual event in Lanzarote about the future...**

Yes, I call it the Good Future Congress. It would be an annual event, a mix between Burning Man and Davos, which includes nature, culture, art and above all, discussions about the future. It could include several days, one or two focused on Lanzarote, the Canary Islands and Spain and two others that are international.

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