

Cathedral challenges

From the late Middle Ages the Tall Pious Lady has towered above the city of Antwerp – my city – in her lofty fashion. The Cathedral of Our Lady, the highest non-secular building of the Benelux, was the subject of 171 years of hard work from 1352 to 1521. It was realised bit by bit, with some trivialities, corrections, reparations, renovations and the turning down of (financially) unattainable projects like a second tower on the way. More extreme examples can be found (rather unsurprisingly) in the south of Europe: the basilica of the Spanish city Zaragoza was completed in 1872 after a construction that lasted for 191 years. The cathedral of Milan takes the cake (for now) with 579 dates of building from 1386 to 1965. The Sagrada Familia in Barcelona will probably surpass this, since Gaudi's pièce de résistance will celebrate its 135th date of building in 2016 and the opening ceremony is not yet in sight. Gossips and other city-marketeers claim that the completion of the cathedral would damage the storytelling proposition of the monument, ergo: attract fewer visitors.¹

What strikes me most about these spectacular religious buildings is the fact that the clients – stadtholders, Gau rulers, patrons, rulers of the Church, dukes, kings and emperors – must have realised that they, their children and even their grand-children wouldn't be attending the launch party. But isn't the puberty of the 21st century in need of the wise words of cathedrals and basilicas? No, I am not referring to the preaching of Biblical truths of Moses or JC's apostles. I am talking about the challenges that the builders of those cathedrals faced: how do you start a project that will last for decennia? What are (were) the goals and touchstones on the way? Is (was) there a secured access to financial means in the course of twenty, fifty or a hundred years? What are (were) the liberties of decision? What are (were) the alternatives or detours when confronted with unexpected and undesired turns (hostile manoeuvres, pandemics, natural disasters, rough economic periods...)? Is (was) there even an environmental impact assessment?

Since 2008 – the year of the subprime mortgage crisis and the following debacle in the (western) financial world – business leaders as well as citizens have come to realise more and more that short-term thinking only serves the culture of greed and that it cannot contribute any solutions to the challenges of our planet with its current² 7.3 billion planners. This is probably even more the case today than it was seven years ago. So why don't we take or support the initiative to look across multiple generations? Why don't we stop asking ourselves the question 'what's next?' Why can't we start wondering 'what happens after what comes next?' This is the essence of 'cathedral' thinking or 'thinking cleverly' if you will: the re-establishment of the long-term, the looking beyond the horizon... Thinking from future perspectives can help us make difficult decisions in the present and avoid missteps as we proceed in time. Psychologists call this the

¹ The chance that the SF will attract fewer visitors is practically non-existent. It is estimated that the global rapid population growth and the attraction of (Western-)Europe on the growing middle-class of the BRIICSSST-countries – the economic 'tigers' Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey – will cause the number of tourists in Barcelona to double between 2015 and 2025. In the period 2004-2014, the amount of tourists doubled from 9.6 to 18.3 millions of overnight stays.

² The world population expands with two people every second. At the time of the previous generation in 1990, this was only 5.2 billion people. In 1950 the world population consisted of 2.6 billion people, which is only 35 percent of the current rate.

technique of 'backward induction' and use it to fight against restraints and fear of failure.

The Future Chronicles is a new yearly magazine funded by Kickstarter. It is described as 'a journalistic expedition through time' and brings you news about social turns and artistic findings between 1964 and 2096. 'As the world around us starts changing rapidly', explains co-publisher Daniel Kiendl, 'it becomes important to retain an overview and to see the bigger picture. This is what we want to provide our readers with.'

Unilever supports very young leadership with **Bright Future Speeches**, which gives them a chance to articulate and spread their message of hope and entrepreneurship for the realisation of a more durable and solidary world.

In 2014, the American insurance company **MassMutual** opened the **Society of Grownups** in Boston, an ideas exchange club for people in their twenties. The Society describes itself as a 'club for adults', where its members can have a chat with each other, gain access to an extensive library and receive a check-up of their financial well-being while they're enjoying their coffee, tea or smoothie. The club focuses on tackling financial challenges and on **recognising** opportunities during the whole period of adulthood, with specific attention to family formation, retirement and care reliance at a higher age.

EterniMe, an American start-up, wants to store data ranging from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, e-mail, GPS, pictures, videos to even Apple Watch and FitBit. Until the day you die, you can and have to curate this data yourself as well as decide what the world will get to see from you after your death. Eterni.me will then shape a smart likeness – an avatar – based on the deceased's digital archive that has become available. The avatar is capable of answering personal questions from family and friends even when many years have passed. In other words, Eterni.me has been trading in digital resurrection, for which more than 30.000 interested people have registered in its first year.

Thinking in 'cathedral' terms doesn't only mean that you have to anticipate across generations. The rejection of the tenet that the creation of a product has to be organised in short, conventional consumption cycles is also a part of it.

Designer **Jake Dyson** – son of – has invented a light bulb that contains enough energy to keep working for 180.000 hours. That equals forty years with twelve hours of lighting every day. Dyson has been using this **CSYS**-lamp in his plea for the re-appreciation of grandeur and ambition.

Other designers believe in the concept of modular products that can be (easily) adapted to its users and thus age and become different. Three producers of practical articles for children have realised that young parents prefer to pay more for their products than to have to replace it again and again with a slightly bigger one. There is the **Wishbone Bike** for example, a bike for children from one to six years old that allows for growth. The **Steps-chair** by **Stokke** transforms easily between the birth of your child and his or her tenth birthday. Finally, the **Shoe That Grows** is a sandal for young children that can be adjusted to five different sizes and that is sturdy enough to be worn for five years.

Not only children's physical growth, but also an adult's inevitable³ mental changes ask for adaptable products. Infamous for the application of 'planned aging', the technology sector is starting to warm up to modular design. One of the advocates and supporters of this movement is the young Dutchman Dave Kakkens, who developed the modular smartphone **Phonebloks** as his graduation project at the Design Academy in Eindhoven in 2013. The immediate cause for the project was that he had to get along without his smartphone for ten days just because one part of it had to be repaired. Another reason was his questioning of the point of image functions on his grandmother's smartphone, since she had poor eyesight. Can't they be replaced by a module capable of gauging her heartbeat or blood pressure? **Google** started an alliance with Phonebloks in the same year in order to launch a fully-fledged smartphone with alterable parts into the world. This so-called **Project Ara** came into being in 2015.

³ Nothing is certain, except that people change...