

TIME WITH TIME

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN MANTHORPE ON HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE SEMINAR SERIES "IN100YEARS". MARTIN MANTHORPE IS DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY NCC CONSTRUCTION DENMARK.

BY FLEMMING WISLER, NXT / HOUSE OF FUTURES

Martin, what did you think when you received the invitation to participate in the project 'In100Years'?

- It was more about just doing it. To attend, even though it was not obvious what the outcome would be. Invitations of this kind are usually filtered out - but because this was stamped with all the right stamps, I turned up.

Can you elaborate? What do you mean by "the right stamps"?

- There was the right weightiness over the event and I was invited by people that I normally listen to.

Would you not have come, otherwise?

- Probably not, even though I am curious and work with strategy. But I prioritize how I use my time very strictly. And that would have been rather an ironic contradiction when the project was specifically about time. We like using time in the short term. But we often neglect the long term - and at the end of the day, that is what is most important.

We also speak a lot about downtime today. When we invited you to the seminars, we asked you to set aside many hours just to listen and talk to others. You were thrown into the meeting with people from disciplines other than business and entrepreneurs. Was there downtime?

- Yes, there was a lot of wasted time, and I enjoyed it! It dawned on me that we have too little downtime in everyday life. We are almost always

inside a structured time which moves towards a higher order. This means that we constantly, consciously and unconsciously, filter disorder out; everything that is not immediately transparent to us. We are harmonizing our network and knowledge gathering and everything else we classify as wasted time. The danger is that we are continually confirmed in what we already believe.

In my own experience, that which one perceives to be a waste of time - or rather time-stress when you are in the middle of it - is often remembered afterwards as something else entirely; something that has left some strong impressions. You were asked to take a couple of days and half days off during the seminars - what was your experience?

- I heartily agree. I think back on it as a bit of a sensory bombardment - not least, because I was challenged both emotionally and intellectually simultaneously. This was reinforced by the fact that it took place over two days for those of us who were in the workshop sessions. In fact, it became a time for reflection. Day one gave me lots of impressions and emotional input, not least from the performance section. There was time to sleep on it and then respond to it on the action-oriented day two.

Is the seminar format something you can use in other contexts?

- Yes, we've actually taken up the idea in NCC on quite a large scale. Last year we introduced the idea of transforming our own headquarters to a campus for small businesses and

students. We introduced a platform for knowledge sharing in the industry across the board, which we call Co-Create Construction.

Can you tell me more about it?

- The idea is to bring people together across the fields of expertise that they are immersed in daily and which, to some extent, help to stop development. I come from an industry that has some important keys when it comes to solving the major sustainability challenges of the future. More than 40 percent of our energy goes towards the heating or cooling of buildings! At the same time it is also from our industry that many of the current climatic problems will have to be solved. We have to build large construction and drainage projects to deter and prevent the consequences of extreme rain and stronger winds and flooding.

How does it work in practice?

- We have invited people to a number of conferences and seminars where we have combined lectures with workshops, and subsequently organized networks via a web community. Next step is to build a large group of students that we assign to the project. We challenge the network with new interdisciplinary innovation projects which include collaboration with the local knowledge network Gate21. In April we will be holding the Danish finals in the global competition for top students - Global Management Challenge which is the world's largest case competition in Strategy & Management.



Martin Manthorpe travelling with 'Future Mind Tours' at the In100Y-seminars. From the top left: Listening besides Joseph Bragdon (seminar 2), talking in the break (seminar 1), visiting 'Power of Nature' (seminar 2, sailing on the 'The Imaginary Tour' (seminar 1) and visiting 'The Delivery Room' (seminar 4).

Do you think that the "Project in-100Years" can become an active network in the same way as Co-create Construction?

- There is no doubt that the kind of reflection and concrete working network that this project is a demonstration of can continue its work, if the participants are brought together regularly. Personally, I have already arranged a meeting with three of the participants from the seminar with whom I will discuss futures. In addition to this, my own strategy work has entered into a much wider perspective.

Have you actually gained a different relationship to time?

- I have certainly realized that the time that lies ahead of us is something one can relate to far more actively than I might have been used to. It's been incredibly exciting to work with Futures research. The scenario work and, not least, the idea of backcasting was quite an eye opener. It is as if we have a tendency to drift with time, rather than actively trying

to manage our own development in a desired direction. In each case, we have trouble thinking further ahead than a couple of years, at the most.

What has made the greatest impression on you? How can you use this knowledge in your work as a strategist for a private company?

- It has gotten me to think about sustainability in a new way. If it takes nature 10,000 years to form a landscape that we can change in a few months, it sets things in perspective. There has to be a self-policing amongst those of us who have the responsibility. It is one thing to work out of ignorance or sheer survival. It is quite another thing if you are aware of the consequences for future generations. I have been given a perspective of the finiteness of the earth with regard to space and resources and this, therefore, compels great respect for what we are working with on a daily basis.

Has it left a mark on NCC in practice?

- We are a large group and we work with corporate governance on many

levels within the company. Everything, therefore, formed a synthesis for me when our Swedish CEO independently of my own journey with 'In100Years' last year defined NCC as a community based system based on responsibility and sustainability. Now I have gained some tools that work specifically with regard to this vision.

Thank you for the interview and your commitment to the project, Martin!

- It was my pleasure. I'm looking forward to continuing the journey!

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