

# Column

## Spend it at the beginning

**'As an architect I think it is your duty to think in the long term'**

More than a year ago I was commissioned to improve the look of a façade of an existing school. It was an aluminum façade with dark green and red panels. A rather somber façade situated in an even more somber industrial area.

From a technical point of view the façade was in good shape. So we decided to change the color of the panels. A new color pattern was designed that resulted in a significant improvement of the façade.

We choose to put a plastic foil on the panels. Of course the budget was very tight , be fortunately we found a contractor who was willing to do the job within the budget. There was no guaranteed lifespan, but he could begin immediately. Once the foil was applied to the panels there were a number of seams between the foil and the window frame due to the contraction of the foil. Very soon after that the corners became detached from the panels. The contractor came with a simple solution: to seal the seams.

A few month later that the same client asked me to give an other school building an 'esthetical upgrade'. As with the other building the façade was technically speaking in good shape. And again we choose to use foil. This time we did things a little different. We choose a foil with a guaranteed lifetime of 10 years. It was however 50 % more expansive en there were requirement as to the temperature and the condition of the surface of the panels. The contractor suggested to take out the panels, take them inside the school, clean them thoroughly en only after that to apply the foil. Of course this made the whole operation considerably more expensive.

After all in the second project we spent twice as much. In spite of that we opted for the last solution. The first façade has, as it appears now, a lifespan of a little over 3 years. At that time some seals and foil will have to be renewed. The second façade has a guaranteed lifetime of 10 years, but from experience we know that it will last for at least 15 years. So although the first façade at the time of the construction was 50% cheaper, over a period of 15 years it was 200 % more expensive.

As an architect I think it is your duty to think in the long term and to show the client what are the cost consequences of the different choices. Fortunately I do meet more and more clients that have a long term view. That do not save now in order to spend it in the future. This requires courage. To spend more at the beginning of a project means that, having a fixed building budget, you can do less. Or if you are dealing with a number of building, do less projects.

I hope to meet a lot of courageous client that do not spend it twice at the end but only once at the beginning.