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Le roi du TYPO3 - king of TYPO3

They kept insisting on putting it on my head. I thought it wasn't really a kings crown. Well, maybe on a baby's head. But on mine it was far too small. It was the sort of crown you would get if you whacked the bottom out of the barrel at the traditional Danish Shrovetide celebrations [1]. Anyway, it was just a joke my new friends at Dassault Systemes in Paris was playing on me and mostly I was just too shy to indulge in it. Le Roi du TYPO3 - the King of TYPO3. That's me. Apparently.

Hi, I'm Kasper, the friendly ghost from Denmark. If you don't know me already, you are probably new to TYPO3. I'm the project founder who started the development 10 years ago. In the year 2000 I published TYPO3 under the GPL and since then a large community has grown around it. That made me the King of TYPO3 quite automatically. Recently, I decided to hand over the development and leadership to the next generation of developers. And so, I'm now reflecting about the history of TYPO3 [2].



Breaking down my disbelief

I remember the first time I went outside of Denmark to do some consulting in the field of TYPO3. It was at a Swiss educational institution called Hyperwerk in Basel in spring 2001. I trained a group of students there in TYPO3 for a few days. In the taxi back to the airport my wife Rie pointed the video camera at me [3] and from my expressions it was evident how this visit had forced me to take TYPO3 seriously! For the first time I really felt convinced that TYPO3 was valuable to people other than myself! Slowly my own disbelief was broken down.

World dominance from Rigersgade 21, 3rd floor

I never planned world dominance or even just to create a top ten Open Source CMS. To this day I still am unable to take this perspective seriously. When I see how popular and highly regarded TYPO3 is in many places it's like something that takes place in a parallel universe. I always worked on TYPO3 to make it the best tool for the job I had at hand. Everything else was a side effect of that. So as you can imagine, I was never into the numbers of success as long as I felt positive about the direction TYPO3 was going. Was it 2000 downloads, 100k page accesses a day, half a million

unique server connections to the Extension Repository? Frankly I haven't kept track of it quantitatively. But I paid attention to the quality all along. OK, let me just reveal a few numbers I did notice. TYPO3.org was served from my 500 kbit ADSL line for the first 2 1/2 years. This included the first months of the Extension Repository's life - served from a cheap Linux box in my humble students chamber in Rigersgade over an internet line shared with 20 others. It worked - outside peak hours. Eventually someone else took over the hosting and with far better performance of course. But I liked the contrast while it lasted.

A popular ride

In fact, the time in Basel gave me the idea to arrange a snowboard tour for the TYPO3 community the following winter. 25 people came! I had to call the travel agency multiple times during the registration period to have them book more cabins. After some days in the Alps, experiencing the external enthusiasm around TYPO3 by the participants, I told one of them: "Now, even I am beginning to believe in TYPO3!". It was truly surreal to witness the growing popularity of TYPO3 since I felt it was only a by-product of sharing a tool I had developed with great love and ambition for my own needs. But I felt very good about this growth because it meant it was pure and natural. Nothing was forced or marketed. It grew because it was good and useful! It survived because it offered value. And maybe God even helped to push it?

Gods favourite?

Did God secure the success of TYPO3 or not? I don't know. It's such a theoretical question. I guess, if TYPO3 was entirely without factual quality it would look like a miracle that thousands of people would still flock around it. Clearly TYPO3 has qualities. Is that enough on its own or does it need a metaphysical helping hand? As most of you may know, my Christian faith always played a role in what I did with TYPO3. I'm a believer. But don't think I have a perfectly intimate relationship with God. I'm not God's favourite. I'm sceptical. I'm broken. I'm desperately seeking identity and meaning like everyone else. I feel very much like a spiritual amateur. But what I have found is the path I know to be true inside. A discovery everyone of us must make on their own. In a dissolved post modern reality, Jesus is like a gravity field of forgiveness and peace to me. And as a bonus, Christianity makes sense rationally: It can satisfy the heart's desires. It describes human nature quite accurately. It brings about a great set of values. It claims to offer an eternal life in which I think we will be ashamed to look back and see how short sighted and fearful we have lived "on earth".

Indiana Jones, me and you

Faith doesn't require perfect knowledge, but it requires action. At a point in the third movie, Indiana Jones stands before a chasm with an invisible bridge. He throws sand out in the air and sees it hovering above the deep. It indicates the existence of the invisible

bridge. Yet, he had to mobilize faith to dare take the first step onto the invisible bridge.

Every choice implies deselection of something else. We will never see what TYPO3 would have had become if I decided not to publish it under a General Public License (GPL). There were indicators that Open Source would be a good idea. But eventually sharing TYPO3 as GPL software was a great step in faith - believing that God meant for me to generously share my creation without hesitation. In return, God has given me more joy than I ever imagined because I have been able to bless other people! Isn't it a paradox that a gift can be to become the servant of others? But this is how it feels, and let me add, glory to God!

It is likely that you are now reflecting about what steps in life you should take "in faith". Whether or not you will take them in the TYPO3 world, remember that popularity is a side effect. The important thing is to listen to your inner voice to find out what your contribution to the world is, then do it. This is democratic. Everyone is important. You are unique, and what your inner voice tells you to do shouldn't be weighted by whether it makes you a big shot or a door mat. It takes faith that maybe you don't have now. I think you will get it if you dare to act on your conscience.

Virtual cigar box

If you ask me to point out one area of TYPO3 I hold especially dear, it has to be the graphics generation system. Even today it provides utility that many other CMS vendors still haven't implemented. And keep in mind that this feature was one of the first features developed back in 1999 and has been left almost unchanged since. I think the humidor-cam joke I pulled around Christmas 2000 proved quite well how powerful it was! I thought it could be fun to offer people a way to donate a cigar to me. So I found a selection of 6 nice cigars in a local shop, photographed them and went home where I built a little online shop with credit card payment and a simple web service that communicated back to typo3.com each time cigars were bought. On typo3.com a picture was shown of my empty humidor (box for storing cigars at the right humidity around 70%), but there was a twist. Each time someone bought a cigar, TYPO3's powerful graphics generation system rendered all the bought cigars on top of the empty humidor, including width, rotation, drop shadows, etc. so one would think it was in fact a live picture of the box! [4] Of course I had to go to the shop and buy the cigars afterwards. And again, it completely surprised me that before New Years Eve I had so many cigars in my box that I probably should have told the Danish tax authorities.

Be fruitful and multiply

How many websites run TYPO3 today? Unfortunately we can only estimate. Today, there are nearly 7000 websites registered at TYPO3.org. Only one year ago this number was around 4000. And we popped champagne bottles when we had reached 1000 only a few years before! But is that number real? In itself it is impressive, but each time I tell people, I hear "Can I register my sites? I didn't do that for any of mine!" Can we safely assume that only 1/10 sites are listed on typo3.org? It wouldn't be too far off. So we have 70.000 websites made with TYPO3! Oh well, this includes high and low profile sites. What about interesting references? Well, take almost any major German company and chances are they are using TYPO3 somewhere in their organization and often for mission critical information delivery. Or search google.com for "Content Management System" and TYPO3 will regularly show up among the top ten. Numbers can be poor proof of popularity, but one thing can be seen everywhere in our statistics: We are growing exponentially!

Dealing with growth



I remember days when the rain was just pouring down - inside that is! I just felt depressed, overwhelmed and incapable of sitting in front of my computer and working on TYPO3. I felt that no matter what I did, the work burden would just grow. No matter how much I tried to delegate, I would never gain the sense of being on top of things. I constantly felt behindhand, there was always a growing list of bugs, like a wave that would swallow you. Personally managing this growth has been the hardest thing in my life and I don't feel

that I really have succeeded. As a person. I'm not well suited to handle such scenarios because I aspire to be a perfectionist. However, I found an oasis here and there, mostly characterized by having clear and obtainable goals that I could concentrate on and indulge in. Later I learned that this working mode is called "flow".

So, the journey from doing everything to almost doing nothing through complete delegation has been very rough and it has definitely worn me out. Today there are broken pieces inside of me, and with the wrong trigger they can bring up a tense feeling of stress in my chest in a split second. But I'm happy to be broken a bit because I don't want my life to pass as a perfect vase but rather to carry the signs of small cracks and being worn in service for good things.

All work and no play

I just browsed in my old diary. I found an interesting entry back from 1998 or so. Basically I concluded back then, that developing a full CMS was much too big a task for me alone, but if I tried, it would require so much dedication that I would lag behind in knowledge of other areas. And that was not acceptable either. I suppose I never read that wisdom again, because this was exactly what I did. TYPO3 has taught me a lot and I have a unique experience base. However, it has also imposed many obligations and roles on me that I couldn't ignore. This has held back my personal growth in an area like education. I was too busy developing features to keep up with modern software development techniques. The influx of inspiration to my professional life has been far too small. As I prophesied in my diary, I should have balanced this better. I'm smart, but not smart enough. I'm trying to be disciplined, but fall short too often. Like most other people I don't live a perfectly balanced life and thus I have to adjust over time. And this is the time to do so. I need to let other people with better ideas, fresh energy, and equally great skills and dedication take the leading role in the development.

The Collective Itch

I now realize that the idealized state in which I worked full time on TYPO3 based on donations actually undermined my sense of "personal itch". Since I didn't use TYPO3 for web projects myself, I felt less and less interested in producing a solution to problems I didn't have! This is quite logical actually. My advice to every programmer who feels motivated by a direct connection to the problem space is this: stay in contact with real world needs!

Of course, this indicates that I could fall in love with TYPO3 again by doing more consultancy. And I could live pretty well on

that! But I'm not interested in wealth if it compromises my happiness. And still there is the issue of inspiration and education. So back in 2004, when we decided to create the TYPO3 Association, I already felt the first signs indicating that it was time to stop. For me, the TYPO3 Association was simply important because I knew that one day I wouldn't be the leader of the project anymore. For that day, there had to be a structure representing a "collective itch" to continue the project. So all along, the TYPO3 Association has been made for this day, today! So prepared, we were.



Love is Life

I know my exit has saddened and discouraged many. I hope you will wake up to sunshine and find that flowers still bloom in our community. When the clouds are gone, you will see how the rain has made the garden soil fertile for something new to break through. But in this garden there are also our friendships, untouched by time and circumstance. And the TYPO3 spirit unique to who we are.

I just recall a verse from the Bible where Jesus says, "This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends." [5] While I'm writing this, tears come to my eyes – tears of happiness, tears that feel good and true. Tears telling me that something is so right about all of this. I mean, that what we do in the TYPO3 community is right, that we are on the good track in sharing with each other. I sense something transcendent about our community and fellowship within. I think Jesus is here. I respect whatever you think. But I believe TYPO3 has helped us all realize that love is bigger than our egos. And Love is Life.

Your Friend, Kasper

Links und Literatur

 *Softlink 1550*

- [1] Danish Shrovetide Tradition: <http://www.visitdenmark.com/uk/en-gb/menu/presse/artikler/kultur/karneval-traditioner/shrovetide-traditions-in-denmark.htm>
- [2] T3DD07 podcast (7/5 2007), pre-GPL history of TYPO3: http://castor.t3o.punkt.de/files/podkast_t3dd07_keynote.m4v
- [3] On the way back from Hyperwerk (Video): <http://castor.t3o.punkt.de/files/hyperwerk.mp4>
- [4] doc_tut_frontend, More details about the humidor cam and how it worked: http://typo3.org/extensions/repository/view/doc_tut_frontend/0.0.1/
- [5] John 15:12-13: (The Message)