

The Goedzak: Give your old things a new life

Design by Simon Akkaya

Text by Pieter Desmet

“It was a dark winter evening in the centre of Amsterdam. We were on our way to the supermarket for groceries. Suddenly, my friend walked over to a bike that was parked next to the supermarket. He bent over the bike and switched off the red tail light. Apparently, the owner had forgotten to do so. His action fascinated me; it was an act of altruism.”

With this anecdote, Simon Akkaya introduces the subject of his thesis: the social phenomenon of altruism. He based his thesis on the definition by medical humanitarian Steven Post: “An altruist is someone who does something for another, for the benefit of the other person, rather than to promote his or her own well-being.” Simon wondered: can I design products that encourage people to display such selfless behaviour? To find ideas, he studied literature, interviewed sociologists, and analysed existing products that support social behaviour.

Designing for altruism

He applied his insights in three domains: altruism in the context of nutrition, immigration and waste. He designed a concept for each domain. The first was ‘variable bread’ (image 1). You pay a fixed price for your bread, but



the size of the loaf of bread is linked to the fluctuations of the international grain price. The packaging provides information on the current grain price. With this bread, you donate the value for the part you don't eat to those who suffer most from high grain prices. The second design was an 'open postcard' (image 2), with which immigrants and local residents can contact each other. Immigrants can also distribute postcards with a personal interest of theirs on it. The card is stamped and addressed to a central address where they are processed. The location reveals something about his or her interest, such as a library, a music shop, or a coffee bar. The resident can write down an offer and mail the postcard to get in contact with the sender.

The Goedzak

The Goedzak (image 3) was the third design in the series. This striking transparent bag gives your old things a chance for a new life. Sometimes, we throw away things that are still perfectly usable. Perhaps, we are not able to take them to a thrift shop, or we simply think it is too much trouble. The Goedzak then offers us an opportunity to do a good deed: fill it with the things you no longer need, and put it out on the street. Anyone can simply pick what they believe can be of value to them. That is how your old things find a new owner. He or she will feel



good about your altruistic deed, and you contribute to sustainability. The Goedzak keeps the things clean and dry. The bright yellow stripe attracts people's attention, and the transparent part makes the contents visible to passers-by. Remaining items are picked up by the charity shop at the end of the day.

The Goedzak is a surprisingly simple, sustainable and social way to discard the products you don't need anymore. The best ideas are often deceptively simple, and the same is true for The Goedzak - which has become a great success. The design won the 'New Material Award' during the Dutch Design Week and was picked up by international media. Simon works with the municipalities of Amsterdam and Eindhoven, and is now designing a special version for supermarket chain Albert Heijn for children to donate their toys during the holidays (image 4). Currently, an online version has also been launched: www.goedzak.com



The variable bread



The open postcard



Designers with vision

Looking back on his thesis project, Simon says: "This is by far the most difficult project I've done during my studies. Beforehand, I would never have accepted a graduation project if I had known that I'd be designing a garbage bag, a postcard and a bread bag. My friends had a good laugh about it - 'Is that the future of design?' But now I'm proud of the result. For the first time, I was able to design without knowing beforehand what the product would be. That open start was a unique challenge and a

great learning experience. Eventually, I managed to capture a lot of complexity in those few simple objects." By now, Simon and his classmate Maarten Heijltjes have their own design agency, Waarmakers. Their mission is to design objects that make people think, encourage them to put things in perspective, are funny and, of course, are sustainable. In short, designers with heart. Or in the words of the Waarmakers themselves: "We like stuff, but we like people better."



Simon Akkaya developed De Goedzak in 2009 as thesis project at Reframing Studio (Amsterdam) for the master's programme *Integrated Product Design* at the TU Delft. The project was his own initiative and part of a wider study into altruism, with the specific question of how designers can support and encourage altruism. Thesis supervisors were Paul Hekkert, Ruud van Heur (TU Delft), and Femke de Boer (Reframing Studio). www.waarmakers.nl

Colophon

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