INTERVIEW BY **MONIQUE VAN DE VEN** (CURSOR) | **INGRID HEYNDERICKX** (SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR ILI), **ELKE DEN OUDEN** (MANAGER OF THE ILI LIVING LIGHT LABS) AND **PHILIP ROSS** (PROJECT LEADER ATLAS LIVING LAB)

Atlas mustn't become an experimental maze

Staking their life on it would be going a little too far, but the initiators are pretty sure that TU/e's Atlas building could very well become the largest indoor living lab in Europe. Eight floors of the renovated building are not only providing the daily workspace of many hundreds of students and employees, soon they will also become the stage for the Atlas Living Lab. Experiment under conditions as natural as possible without making unwitting guinea pigs of the building's occupants; that is what researchers can do in Atlas as of this spring. But not just anyone.

The lab extends from floor 4 through to floor 11; at the heart of the technical infrastructure here lies a 'connected office' light system produced by Signify, a combination of smart energy-saving LED luminaires (each with its own IP address) and sophisticated mini sensors and detectors that record movements. If extra sensors, for example, are needed for experiments, they can be added, with the necessary approval.

ETHICS COMMITTEE

To gain this approval researchers must be clear-minded and well-organized ahead of time; the doors of Atlas are certainly not thrown open for just any experiment. Every research proposal - short-term or lengthy, small scale or, for example, spread over multiple floors, originating in-house or from external parties - is put through a process in which TU/e's Ethics Committee assesses and weighs up each individual aspect. Furthermore, in agreement with lab coordinator Nasir Abed, steps are taken to ensure that studies do not overlap or influence one another.

Den Ouden: “First of all, a research proposal is discussed. What does this person want to do, for what purpose and for how long? And are all the floors involved, or could only one wing be used? What does this person plan to publish and what not?” Moreover, every research study must have a certain relevance to TU/e and any ‘strain’ that might be put on people in the building must be worth it. Or, as Heynderickx puts it jovially: “We don't want to become an experimental maze”.

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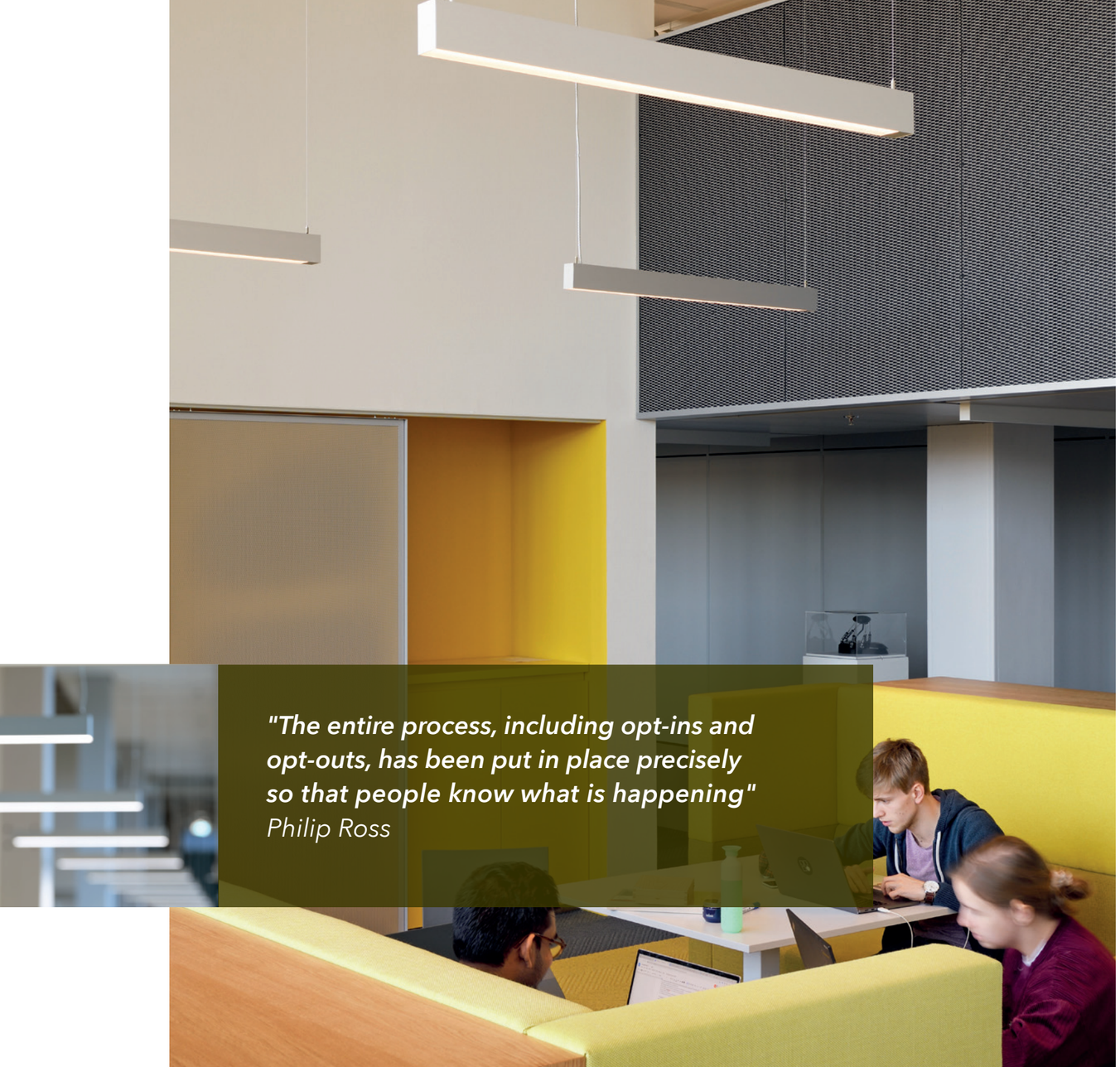

"The entire process, including opt-ins and opt-outs, has been put in place precisely so that people know what is happening"
Philip Ross

First and foremost, the building occupants (both students and employees) will always be informed shortly in advance of an experiment - individually or as a group, depending in part on the nature and extent of the planned research. Furthermore, especially where some degree of disruption to their everyday work may be expected, they always have the choice whether or not to participate - likewise the opportunity to, say, work temporarily in another wing or on another floor, where no experiment is running.

AVOIDANCE

Valuable input regarding this was also provided by the feedback round the initiators held with the University Council, the Services Council, the Departmental Councils, trade unions, and others.
Another aspect that was (and still is) given plenty of attention is the policy governing the data collected - with the European privacy law (AVG), the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the TU/e Code of Scientific Conduct providing the framework.

Come what may, no data will be collected without students and employees being notified in advance, and in principle no data (not even combined data) will be traceable to a particular individual - unless he or she has expressly consented to this. "Nor will we browse through data that is being continuously gathered on another server for the purposes of managing the building. The entire process, including opt-ins and opt-outs, has been put in place precisely so that people know what is happening," Ross emphasizes.

TRANSPARENCY ABOUT RESULTS

This is one reason, says the researcher, why it is considered important that findings are shared with the people in the building. "We are part of an academic community, so people here tend to be interested in research results of this kind anyway. Communication on this topic must be transparent." Not that all the raw research data will be dumped on the internet, Heynderickx hastens to add, "but to a certain extent we will most definitely disseminate the results, but without it being possible to trace them back to individual persons".
Ingrid Heynderickx hopes that the first experiment in the Atlas Living Lab will be running before this coming summer. The laboratory was officially opened on March 21st, at the same time as the festive opening of the renovated building.

This is a shortened version of a Cursor Interview. You can read the full article here:
https://www.cursor.tue.nl/en/background/2019/maart/week-2/atlas-mustnt-become-an-experimental-maze/