LIVING, WORKING AND TRAVELLING

New Processes of Hybridization for the Spaces of Hospitality and Work

edited by Francesco Scullica, Elena Elgani

DESIGN INTERNATIONAL SERIES

Over the last few years the international design research network has become an important reality, which has facilitated the sharing of ideas and opinions, improved understanding of the subject and increased awareness of the potential of design in various socio-geographical contexts.

The current expansion of the educational network allows teachers, students, researchers and professionals to meet, both online and in person.

It would seem therefore that the time is now right to propose a new series of books on design, contributing the construction of the international design community, helping authors bring their work onto the world scene.

The Design International series is thus born as a cultural setting for the sharing of ideas and experiences from the different fields of design, a place in which you can discover the wealth and variety of design research, where different hypotheses and different answers present themselves, in an attempt to draw up a map of Italian design, though in a continuous comparison with the world scene.

Different areas of design will be investigated, such as for example: fashion, interior design, graphic design, communication design, product and industrial design, service and social innovation design, interaction design and emotional design.

Books published in this series are selected by the Scientific Board and submitted to two referees for peer-review.

LIVING, WORKING AND TRAVELLING

New Processes of Hybridization for the Spaces
of Hospitality and Work

—

edited by Francesco Scullica, Elena Elgani

D.I. **FrancoAngeli**
DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863
DIPARTIMENTO DI DESIGN

WOR
KSC
APE
HOS
PITA
LITY

The publication is patronized by FederlegnoArredo - Assufficio

FLA
FEDERLEGNOARREDO

Cover image: Lobby in ZOKU, Amsterdam, 2017 (ph. Courtesy of Ewout Huibers).

Contents

7

The International Conference HOW
HOspitality&Workscape

Conclusions

Foreword

Silvia Piardi[1], Luisa Collina[2]

This book collects the results of a research funded by FARB - Fondo di Ateneo per la Ricerca di Base (University Fund for Basic Research), aimed at supporting researches at the Design Department of the Politecnico di Milano.

The starting point of the research was the analysis of a new hybrid dimension, springing from the contemporary overlap and integration of behaviours, functions and objects that make our world increasingly more complex to conceive and design.

Nowadays the field of interior design must deal with issues that adhere to the evolution of new spatial realities, characterized by functional and temporal mixes which have been emerging in recent years.

This topic highlights how the main objective of the scientific field is to go beyond the most recurrent situations, investigating innovative contexts, scenarios and trends.

The research focused on the hybridization between two specific fields of interior design, that of hospitality and that of work, which play a fundamental role in the lives of individuals and are therefore the subject of new studies, since these fields have been changing following new fluid ways of "living, working, travelling", that characterize our contemporary lives.

The research was carried out through studies of professors and researchers of the Design Department and through didactic activities, complementary to the research, developed during courses and workshops held both at the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano and in Foreign Schools.

This research approach is typical of the design system of the Politecnico di Milano (that includes the School of Design, the Design Department and POLI.design): research activities and didactic activities both contribute to the definition of new scenarios for contemporary identities and "performances" of advanced systems of spaces-products-services-experiences.

---

[1] Silvia Piardi is Director of the Department of Design - Politecnico di Milano.
[2] Luisa Collina is Dean of the School of Design - Politecnico di Milano.

Furthermore this approach always seeks relationships with the professional and productive realities of the design system, with particular reference to the Milanese one – this is done both for a constructive "service" towards companies, design and consulting firms, and for relating the Politecnico design graduate to the professional world.

The connection with the professional and productive realities is visible in this book in which contributions by the scientific-academic world come together with considerations and thoughts by professionals, brands and business enterprises. Therefore a text that deals in an original way with contemporary themes that concern our daily lives.

Move on

Silvia Piardi[1]

Introduction

From 22nd to 26th May 2017 Milano celebrated the week of Agile Work, to spread the new working culture released from traditional restrictions and to give substance to the recently promulgated law[2].

Agile work interprets and enacts the mixture and the hybridization between working and non-working time. The topic of my consideration concerns mobility, work and environments. I intend the term mobility in its wider meaning, therefore referred both to the possibility of moving within the spaces dedicated to work, and to the work activities that are carried out outside the designed environments, in other places and in other spaces.

I would like to announce the advent of one more revolution, the one that sets the worker free from the chair.

This is certainly a provocation, since Italian and international designers have dedicated enormous intellectual and economic resources in designing the perfect chair, that almost became the symbol of the search for form, of the most advanced technology, or of the most radical innovation. But in workplaces, standards require homologated models, which leave little to imagination – the classic chair with the five races.

The idea is to imagine an office work that moves "nimbly", practicing different ways of relating people, spaces and equipment. Following there is a quick run through different models of organizing spaces and times of work.

---

[1] Silvia Piardi is Director of the Department of Design - Politecnico di Milano.

[2] The Italian Law on Smart Working: Legge 22 maggio 2017, n. 81 "Misure per la tutela del lavoro autonomo non imprenditoriale e misure volte a favorire l'articolazione flessibile nei tempi e nei luoghi del lavoro subordinato".

The Order of Things in the World

My generation can witness some radical passages in the design of the work spaces and of the equipment within them.

The change, that has taken place and is still happening, is evoked below, without forgetting that in any case the evolutionary processes move at different speeds.

In fact, while the changes in the organization and distribution of work and consequently of the related equipment are increasingly observed, the models of last centuries survive – and they are the most diffused ones. The modern narration has described the attempt, continually pursued through a long historical process over the centuries, to put order in a chaotic world.

This process can be read through the definition of working hours – released from the natural rhythms that used to determine their limits – and non-working hours.

The determination of timing was combined with that of spaces: their distribution followed precise functional logics, considering a success the ability to create specialized areas, dedicated exclusively to a single activity. A concept of space thought according to the Cartesian axes, an abstract vision of the relation space-time, within which both architecture, with its functional categories, and time, with its orderly determination of lives, should be inscribed. Those who did not follow this order were considered, at least, bizarre, if not asocial and/or unethical.

Within the two categories, therefore, the human figure was inscribed and forced. Not only in the places of work, but also at school: an orderly row of desks, all at the same distance, usually with connected seat and table, often the same desks and chairs both for little girls or grown up boys, children frozen in the same position for the programmed number of hours (as, however, it still happens in almost all schools of every order and type). It is forbidden to move. Fifteen minutes in the yard are enough to stretch legs.

All this represents a western vision, that has evolved and stratified over the centuries, starting from the Greek (when the Peripatetic School existed ...), through the harmonious idea of the world and the order of things of the Renaissance, the Cartesian rationality, the 19th century rationality and then the 20th century rationalism.

This narration has been falling apart from the twenties of the twentieth century, eroded by a series of phenomena, even if the culmination of the idea of order had yet to be unfold in all its cruel manifestations by the Nazi organization. During the first decades of last century, a series of considerations was evolving in different fields of knowledge – physics, mathematics, literature, architecture and music; these considerations were deeply changing

the ideas of order in space and time, as they had been until then conceived.

Those first signs of rebellion against the rational order have become over the years a continuous rumble, which, with the advent of information technology, led a long historical period to the conclusion.

The idea of time has changed, as well as the idea of space.

This Room as no More Walls

Crossed by information technology, buildings no longer have walls, houses are no longer a protected island; radio first, then television and finally the advent of the internet melt the boundaries and bring the feeling of simultaneous presence in more places.

They also bring the possibility of using day and night in a continuous cycle, in order to work in different places of the world: files are sent in the evening, drawings are developed the following morning in some distant – but not as far – part of the planet.

The world of tertiary work has undergone a drastic transformation and evolution. The office is the place of registration and transformation of information; these activities can be carried out in different ways, depending on the complexity of the processes and the number of people involved.

From the mobile desk on the dock used to record goods, where only one person managed commercial information flows, to the folding military equipments used to write orders and proclamations during the war campaigns, to the placement of office space closed to the production or to the commercial activities, up to the creation of dedicated buildings designed according to the evolution of the various ideas related to the organization of work.

Basic equipment is always linked to writing: documents are written, filed, read, consulted. With offices designed ad hoc, the aim is to control: every employee must be in sight, the panopticon law is in force, production must be verified and above all the worker must sit in his place for all the hours agreed in the contract. Few breaks are allowed.

We work and study in orderly rows, sat at our desks. This is the point: sit for eight hours, bent over documents before, on computer later, however always forced in a space and for a defined time.

Forced times and modes, alleviated by some union achievements, and by labour norms that – again – establish rules in a quantitative way: how many hours at the computer, how many breaks, what distance from the screen, what from natural light, what kind of seat, what density per square meter, what intensity of light, what colour of surfaces... from the state laws up to

the contractual or company rules, which define, according to the different hierarchies, presence or absence of shielding curtains, presence and type of ornamental plants, dimensions and materials of the furnishings, type of paintings on the walls, and height to which they are hanging. Starting from the seventies in large companies a process had begun, that would show its importance in the following years.

The increase of energy cost, following the war of Kippur and other related economic phenomena, had put an end to the era of low-price oil, and had profoundly changed the economies linked to the management of large artificial buildings, which were born to make the most out of building areas.

The first operation to reduced costs therefore consisted in reducing the air flow rates in the buildings, but this decision caused a series of health problems and discomfort.

The loss of working days, directly linked to the poor quality of the air, was not economically advantageous, as demonstrated by thousands of pages of research and thousands of hours of international conferences, very often sponsored by the tobacco industry, intended to demonstrate, or at least trying to prove, that cigarette smoke was not the worst pollutants. Thousands of pages therefore dedicated to the statement that people work better if they are not sick, stressed, relegated in unhealthy environments.

Finally, we are in the years when we start talking about the relationship between productivity and work environment, especially with regard to creative and high added value professions.

Sustainability, pleasantness, presence of greenery, view on the outside, bright colours begin to be designed and placed inside the workplace. Offices dispose of the gray suit, all shades of gray and beige, and begin to show off brighter colours: even the articulation of the spaces comes out of orthogonal rigidity and seeks softer and more organic forms. The quantity and the quality of meeting places grow: shapes, colours and materials typical of the domestic context enter the office.

Get Up and Walk

People start to discover, study and develop the idea that humans, men and women (and children!) were not meant to remain seated for too long, whatever the position and the quality of the seat is. More and more studies confirm how harmful this is, and underline how the whole body is affected, from the vertebral column, to the internal organs, to the brain, that receives less oxygenation.

The conquest of the chair, the right to sit, can become a negative factor if the posture lasts for too many hours. However, being forced to always stand up is equally negative. As always, it is better to alternate positions and it is increasingly recommended to include movement in one's working practice. Working alternating positions is common practice in many Northern European countries, and this practice is also suggested in schools.

New equipments have been designed, such as adjustable shelves and stools that allow different postures.

The most important indication is that any position, even the one considered ergonomically perfect, is harmful if held for many hours and for many years. Get up, walk, move around whenever possible, become a healthy practice, consume calories, and oxygenate the brain.

Already at the end of the Eighties, Toni Alberts, with his visionary project of the Ing Bank of Amsterdam, had claimed that people are better if they are physically active: in his project he put into practice a series of "tricks" to make people move, such as put the photocopier or the archive far from the workstation, design the stairs and promote their use through signage, set up pleasant corridors in which to stop, with greenery and works of art. It was noted that productivity did not decrease, but increased. People were happier and worked with more harmony, also good relationships between people, workers and the company were established. A great discovery that Alberts translated into a project, but that many researches had already suggested.

This discovery re-evaluates all the spaces previously neglected, like stairs and corridors: places of transit become important, they are no longer undefined spaces but they acquire their own value: here people meet, they exchange non-formal information, they create or destroy friendships and partnerships. The coffee machine, traditionally relegated to the darkest corner of the office space and close to the toilets, now gets new importance, and is upgraded to "relaxation area"; the most enlightened chiefs are in favour of meetings between employees: the coffee break acquires a different meaning.

Desk, Photos and Puppets

This paragraph concerns the invention of the so-called "hot desk" and all that surrounds it. Hot desk means rotating desk, perhaps as a memory of the "hot bunk" of the ancient sailing ships and the modern submarines, where the number of people didn't match the number of beds. Hot desk was invented to reduce, during the years of the crisis, the office square meters and therefore the costs related to the management and immobilization of fixed capital.

The idea is to work on several shifts, always using the same workstation. There is no space for personal effects, work documents are placed in a chest of drawers on wheels. The end of the private desk, full of personalization, with children's drawings, puppets, photos of kittens and other domestic animals, is defined. This change makes the work of the designer, which has carefully designed rigorous and perfectly calibrated interiors, almost vain.

The hot desk hates kittens and puppets and for this reason it did not have much success in Italy, where companies that pursued this model with favourable outcomes are rare. As a matter of fact, in a few years, a series of conditions have changed the Italian economic situation: from the reduction in the number of employees, which made the sharing of desks unnecessary, to the real estate crisis, that saw the value of buildings decrease and which made the relocation to smaller buildings often less cheap, but with a new lease, usually less convenient than the old one. So in reality the hot desk model hasn't had great significance in the Italian context, but it is anyway important because it started the fracture of the biunivocal relationship between the workstation and the worker, a fracture that is increasingly opening up, for good, and for bad.

For good because jobs are less tied to a specific physical place – i.e. the agile work –, for bad because sometimes these mechanisms lead to a negative flexibility, which tends to make the person superfluous in favour of the function – the business practice of creating email addresses starting from the office function, no longer indicating the names of those who work there, is in line with the depersonalization and substitutability among workers. Surely a more efficient organization, but to be looked at with some concern. The great revolution, which is progressively advancing, lies in the transformation of the visual control linked to the schedules, to the check of results, according to established objectives.

This revolution is not easy to pursue, because it involves a radical change in the corporate culture. And if large companies seem almost ready to pursue it, still small and medium-size enterprises and the Public Administration struggle to change their perception of control.

The "Agile Work" refers in fact to the possibility of working in different places and according to one's own timing, provided that the objective is achieved, without taking in count the standard eight hours seated at the desk, in the dedicated spaces.

It is a dream to combine domestic care and work, to avoid long journeys, to work from home or other places. It is a nightmare if working at the kitchen table (with the bottle of Fernet to keep company) makes one feel isolated. Therefore, also in this case, integrating work at a distance and that in the office, becomes crucial, considering the importance of relationships among workers. In conclusion, all places and no place, all times and all the time, a continuous

mixture of working and non-working times/places are characterizing our contemporaneity. We live the paradox that we are always connected to the web, but that we move more and more to work: yet we witness another wrong prediction, the one that said that with the rise of connection technologies we would have no longer moved to work. Instead people increasingly work on public transports and in all the "non-lieux" between one plane and another, between one train and another, where idle time is more and more alive. Outside the office, rules, postures, gestures, the way of being change. The key element is movement: we should start designing wearable, light offices, considering that the office space has gradually shrunk and is experienced like a dress, while time has indefinitely expanded.

I am writing this article on the train from Rome to Milano, a space which is partially set free (disconnected) by high speed that makes the connection to the web difficult and therefore allows much thought.

References

Koyré A. (2000), *Dal mondo del pressappoco all'universo dell'indecisione*, Einaudi, Torino.

Martini C.M. (2001), *Figli di Crono. Undicesima cattedra dei non credenti*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.

Piardi S. (2004), "Sto a casa a lavorare, abito in fabbrica. Cultura del progetto e segni del futuro", in Faré I., Cascitelli L., Barbara A., Bassanini G., Piardi S., *Nuove specie di spazi,* Liguori, Napoli.

Rovelli C. (2017), *L'ordine del tempo*, Adelphi, Milano.