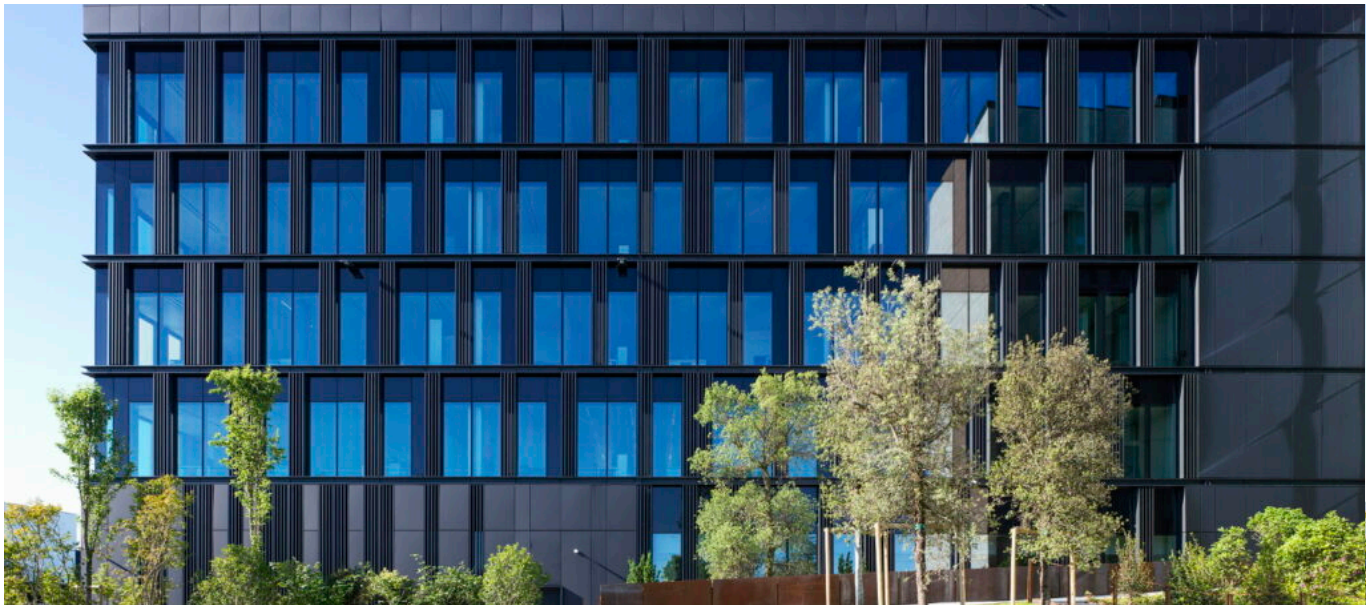
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New workplaces: creative forges, no longer hives of solitary activities

New workplaces are creative forges instead of hives of solitary activities

According to James Finestone and David Hirsch (ARUP), the pandemic has brought a great acceleration in a sector of very slow change

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In the wake of a reflection on the changes in workspaces in the industrial and post-industrial era, Il Giornale dell'Architettura intends to promote a 4-question inquiry to architects and designers known for their projects in the field of spaces for entrepreneurship and work. Here the answers of James Finestone e David Hirsch (ARUP).

The design of workspaces in the last half-century has seen an evident change in its layout and its inspiring principles. Among ephemeral phenomena, of style

and trends, changes seem to be caused by the market, which has led to the reduction of storage stocks and the expansion of marketing, research, and design spaces. In your work as a designer, how do you adapt to this epochal change? What is your model of inspiration?

David Hirsch: Arup has a long experience in Science&Industry projects from manufacturing to pharmaceutical and data centres, often working in collaboration with the client to better define the brief of the project, its technological solutions and functionality. It is true that the market has always generated changes to industry asking to innovate and constantly raise ambitions in terms of quality of the product, sustainability, digitalization, and technology.

As Arup we aspire and are currently experiencing opportunities to support these new ambitions in the sector: our model is to put our client at the center, trying to bring support, efficiency and intelligence to the design thinking process. Our multidisciplinary approach, covering a wide range of disciplines helps our clients to interrogate their needs in a holistic way and direct the design in a more strategic way.

The experience of working with Starbucks for the design of a Roastery in Milan, is an interesting example of the evolution of the sector, where commercial and production spaces are becoming more and more interconnected: a factory has been brought into the city centre, breaking the boundaries between functions and uses, making the process of coffee toasting, packaging and sale become part of the customer's experience.

In this transformation, that is also affecting other industry sectors and products, we understood the key role played by the design and confirmed the value of creating a strong collaboration and partnership between the client and its design consultants.

Workspaces are also community spaces and this was also the starting point of Adriano Olivetti's great intuition. Workspaces are related to cities and wider society through relationships in constant change. Nevertheless in the condemnation of any ghettoization, the only function for which compartmentalization still seems to be accepted remains that of industrial districts. Is this planning logic still relevant? Will the acceleration of digital working caused by the pandemic, affect these aspects of workspace design at the architectural and/or urban level?

The pandemic has completely shocked a consolidated model and state of mind, and we are all now trying to predict how this extreme experience could influence the future of offices and the

model of work. I think that we should probably redirect the question and ask ourselves what should be taken from this experience to better plan our cities, workplaces and raise the quality of our life. In these days we can observe of how work, especially service activities rather than production, could be developed in a much more dispersed way, where people are physically isolated and virtually connected. On the other hand, we still believe and have to encourage direct social connections as human values and a great opportunity for informal and successful exchange of information. Industrial districts still exist and will probably resist as long as they need specific physical spaces, proximity to energy sources, accessibility and networks. Science and pharmaceutical activities will keep searching connections with laboratories, hospitals and possibly physical and direct relationships with universities and research centres.
What is certainly changing is the distinction between different functions and uses: during the last year of pandemic we have seen how quickly our apartments have been forced to be transformed into office places, classrooms, gyms and we will probably have to start thinking in this direction. Buildings, even if physically defined, have often a great capacity to be transformed and adapted to new uses and functions and city planning should be able to capture this trend and imagine a much more flexible city.

The design of workspaces seems to be increasingly based on informality and horizontality, leading, in the best case, to an equally high quality between the spaces of managers and employees, both in offices, furniture, equipment, and in guaranteed services. In your experience, is it a question of binding to affection and brand-belonging or of encouraging participation? Has it ever happened in your work that the participation of the entire workers' community started already at an earlier stage of the process, shaping the design phase?
James Finestone: In the last 50 years, especially in the last two decades we have seen a migration from cellular office space representing a more vertical organisational hierarchy typified by the 'false prestige' of the corner office, to much more open flexible, activity based work styles and environments. In the creative and service industries, the reasons for this evolution are many but include changes in management styles and organizational structures, a shift to creative and collaborative value generation and the expectations of new generations arriving in the workplace.
However, what we have seen in the last year is nothing short of a seismic shock to what has

been a slowly changing environment. The future has arrived sooner than expected. Nobody has all the answers but there are lots of experimentations in place. We will see a massive shift to workplaces becoming centres of collaboration and creative confrontation rather than bee hives of more solitary activity. We will see workplaces express this flexibility and openness, increasingly managed digitally for space allocation and a completely different tolerance and expectation for the ability to work partly from home, partly from the office and other places. Many businesses will be able to function better with more people operating out less space than before. The impact of this on the commercial property market remains to be seen but I expect to be dramatic.
At Arup we are taking a participatory approach by asking all of our 15,000 people very detailed questions about how they see the workplace of the future and how they would like to balance their work and workplace location. We are learning a great deal about how to change our offices to be flexible dynamic centres of creative activity.

We would now like to ask a question regarding architectural studies as workspaces. Democracy, flexibility, integration, participation are in fact requisites required by many architectural works, and especially the ones of workspaces. But do they also apply to designers and architectural studios? In other words, are architecture studios spaces of community and fair compensation? Do the projects for new spaces for work arise in places that conform to the principles they should transmit and transpose into architecture?
The architectural office represents a typology within the service sector that is fascinating to study in this current crisis and period of change. On the one hand we have responded to the shifts identified in the previous question and proved that we can do almost everything in a flexible and networked, remote way but on the other hand, there are some aspects of the creative act of architecture that are difficult to replace completely with action at a distance and digital connection. Ultimately, we require people to come together in physical space to design spaces for people. The qualities indicated in the question of democracy, flexibility and participation for instance can only be really debated, explored and resolved with a foundation of at least some face to face communication.

Who is David Hirsch

He is an architect specialised in integrated design. As an Associate he leads the Architecture Milan team providing architectural services on a wide range of projects and sectors. David has led complex multidisciplinary projects, including providing full design and site support for the Starbucks Reserve Roastery in Milan, as well as doing the concept design for the new AC Fiorentina stadium in Florence. He is currently the project architect for the Supernova urban regeneration masterplan in Pavia.

Who is James Finestone

He leads Arup's Architecture in Europe, providing sustainable design to clients across the region. As a Director specialised in integrated design, he has led complex multidisciplinary building and masterplanning projects across the world. He holds a Masters in AI and Machine Learning in the built environment and sees Digital as a fundamental part of solving tomorrow's challenges through design. Recent work includes Jaguar Land Rover's award-winning Manufacturing Centre in the UK, Sustainable modular housing in Netherlands and Denmark's Roskilde Fjord Crossing.

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