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According to Mina Hasman (SOM), the design of work spaces will play a greater role in the future in the physical, functional and experiential definition of the cities

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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 Mina Hasman (SOM).

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?

We are experiencing a momentous shift in how we define the workplace. Offices that were expanded in the past to accommodate specific functions are now likely to contract—giving way to a new era of work, heavily shaped by digitalization. The adoption of remote working has led some people to ask, "Do we even need offices anymore?"

I believe that offices will still have a place in our lives, but with a renewed purpose: encouraging human interaction and building community. The workplace will become a place where we join our colleagues to develop and pursue a shared sense of purpose. Digital working cannot replace this.

We should always remember the upside of the need to adapt to change. Agility and adaptability — whether a cultural shift or of a physical space — are part of what it means to be resilient. It's necessary to our evolution. Without the need to confront change, we will never try, fail, learn, and grow — that is, never innovate.

Thinking about change is at the heart of what we do as designers. We believe that the buildings we design should serve their users not just for now, but for decades into the future, and even accommodate uses we can't imagine today. That's why our process is grounded in a dual approach: anticipating future needs, while providing the flexibility to allow for needs we cannot yet envision.

I am therefore, inspired by the rigour scientists apply when investigating an idea as a solution to a problem that does not yet exist but will likely emerge. This proactive and predictive approach is what is increasingly expected of designers — especially now, when we must address a multitude of competing priorities (of health, climate, economy), and deliver solutions fast and at scale.

Our role as designers is consequently shifting, our responsibility is growing. Design is no longer simply an outcome of aesthetics; it is a measure of performance. A new design rigour is emerging — one with an entrepreneurial mindset, rooted in continuous evaluation of data and insights — especially critical in the design and management of workplaces as they are one of the fastest transforming typologies of our time.

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?

Work is a fundamental part of ensuring that communities thrive, economies prosper, and cities rejuvenate. Considering the UN's projection that two-thirds of the world's population will reside in cities by 2050, there will be an ever-growing symbiotic relationship between people and the city. The work landscape is a key component for nurturing that relationship, and enabling the exchange needed for growth, innovation, and adaptation. The design of workspaces will, therefore, only continue to play a greater role in the physical, functional, and experiential shaping of our cities.

One of SOM's landmark buildings, Lever House in New York, is a testament to how design of a building and its immediate surroundings can transform and strengthen this symbiotic relationship: the building's plaza and lobby are used as exhibition spaces, drawing public around and into the building, inviting them to actively interact with it within the unique setting of Manhattan.

The design of workplace will evolve as the digitalization of our world will inevitably continue to render our cities more fluid, breaking down the distinct compartmentalization that exist today. This is an outcome of many changes being introduced in cities: population growth is leading to ever-more diversified communities, mingling cultures, traditions, and behaviours. What may appear to be distinct communities today will invariably overlap, as cities densify and neighbourhood boundaries blur.

Another change that is shaping our cities' evolution is the advancement of AI technologies, and the increased communication infrastructure we see deployed throughout urban environments. Even in our industry, we are already seeing the increased automation of many traditionally manual tasks, such as model making (now mostly automated with 3D printing). However, this should not be seen as a sign of the end of the human workforce, but as the beginning of a new era of optimization, efficiency, and adaptability — core attributes for long-term resilience in our rapidly changing world.

Shared resources and continuous exchange of information are shaping the planning of urban districts as well, where workspaces are being favoured if they are weaved into mixed-use buildings, so that they can become an integral part of the liveable, healthy and sustainability city ecosystem.
More than fifty years ago, SOM pioneered this approach with the design of the world's first mixed-use tower, John Hancock Center in Chicago. In more recent decades, we have extended this concept to the city district designs where Charenton-Bercy Redevelopment in Paris is setting an exemplar precent.

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?
The invention of the modern-day open plan work environments in the 1990s is what initially introduced the idea of the informality: as we had seen with the cubicle farm offices of 1960s, the open plan offices of the late 20th century resulted in an epochal transformation in the workplace landscape. This transformation has since influenced the way we conduct our work in an open and collaborative manner, and toned down the corporate hierarchy, bringing us all to a human level — introducing a level of comfort and confidence for equal presence 'around the table', and advocacy for creative ideas.
The design of the workspace has since been critical for nourishing that kind of behaviour, and promoting equal access to individuals, functions, and high-quality spaces that are deemed essential for delivering innovation signaled by the Neo-modernism movement.
This evolution of the workplace manifested itself in the design of office buildings, interior spaces and even products: the celebration of glass facades was an intentional choice to maximise equal access to daylight indoors to enhance people's wellbeing and productivity. The strategic location of long work-hour desks in places where views would enable a continuous connection to city life outside, and in more recent years, the informal break-out areas with inclusion of art, greenery, and organic distribution of funky furniture of bean bags and treadmill desks, continue

to place wellbeing at the heart of workplace design, and becoming the unyielding expectation of business owners.
Design is a creative industry, and creativity is only enriched when diverse perspectives and ideas are shared. This requires a free flow of exchange, and early engagement with the end users can facilitate the co-creation of an idea into a valued and effective outcome.
As interdisciplinary approach is ingrained in SOM's ethos, we are accustomed to engaging as many 'actors' along the value chain of a project as possible, on day one. This enables us to curate our designs to future occupants' specific needs, and empowers them to become active participants in the design process — our United Nations Campus in Geneva is a great testament to this approach which we envision will result in high user satisfaction and long-term (building) performance once occupied later this year.

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?
Yes, definitely. The design work that comes out of an architectural studio is a reflection, as well as a culmination of the creativity, approach and vision the culture that company exudes. A vision for design and creativity is only limited by the 'invisible' boundaries defined by a workplace, its culture, and people.
Defining a 'healthy' workplace culture is not an easy task, and especially defining one for a design firm that thrives on successfully integrating the intelligence and creativity delivered by individualistic yet dynamic minds. This is particularly challenging when you add the layers of interdisciplinarity and internationalism to the picture — as we experience it at SOM — where individuals from various backgrounds constantly strive to deliver unified, holistic and innovative solutions for projects all around the world. This is what enriches the work experience at SOM, and defines our inclusive, empowering, and stimulating workplace culture. Designers at all levels have an equal opportunity to present and debate ideas, contribute their skills, and collectively shape the vision for each project. Our office culture informs the way we design and

deliver healthy and inclusive workplaces for others.
Our physical workspaces, from London to New York, Chicago to San Francisco, reflect our values, approach, and care for design. Each of these spaces has daylighting and views out to the city; the use of natural materials to create a sense of 'informality', familiarity, and comfort; diverse work areas to suit individual and collaborative work needs; control over personal space; and greenery integrated throughout. Beyond designing the interiors, we have taken the opportunity to locate several of our offices within buildings also designed by SOM — which allows us to connect inside and outside, our firm's legacy and future, into a single, holistic experience that is authentic to our design philosophy. These are the key strategies we deploy in all of our office and workplace design projects.

Who is Mina Hasman

She leads Skidmore Owings and Merrill's sustainability and wellbeing daily operations and long-term vision for achieving excellence in practice. She has experience in a wide variety of projects in the UK, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, bringing a greater understanding of the implications for sustainable and equitable design in different climatic, social, and regulatory contexts.

As a recognised expert in her field, Mina has been elected to, and actively involved in the UKGBC's Board of Trustees, the RIBA Ethics & Sustainable Development Executive Leadership Group, UNEP/GlobalABC's COP26 Task Force (as the Commonwealth Association of Architects' Focal Point), the (UK) Construction Industry Council's Climate Change Committee, WorldGBC's Whole Life Carbon Task Group, and IWBI's Health Equity Advisory Group.

Mina regularly contributes to the wider climate change, sustainability, and wellbeing debate in her role as tutor at various academic institutions, as well as regular speaking appearances at many international events.

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Autore

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