TRANSITIONING FROM PHYSICAL TO VIRTUAL SPATIAL PROXIMITY

THE EFFECT ON PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY OFFICE

Author: Artemis Panagiotou

— ABSTRACT

In this paper we will be examining how spatial proximity affects individual
and collective performance within the European contemporary office. It is a
research regarding the relationship between physical space formed by con-
struction and design and social space developed by interactions and roles
its members adopt.

Technology and globalization along with the severe economic debt crisis the
European countries are facing have completely redefined today's working con-
ditions. Labor is the first body which is being subjected to austerity and
is inevitably facing instability, insecurity, temporary or part-time employ-
ment and migration as some of the effects of the crisis.

From a more tangible point of view, apart from the decrease in wages, phys-
ical space is actually being compromised. And technology allows that. Modern
technology has managed to create a virtual world which tries to resemble as
much as possible the quality reproduced in physical space. Sometimes this
version is even improved, without the obstacles the physical world natural-
ly incurs, such as time and space limits. This often makes physical presence
unnecessary, which is a momentous revelation since it questions our materi-
ality, tangibility our own actualness and palpability. People do not need to
be present to communicate their performance and collaborate because they can
share their production and interact by using technological mediums. So slow-
ly but surely we see a clear transition from physical to virtual proximity.

But what do we define as proximity and what are the differences between its
virtual and physical nature? If physical proximity is a system of spatial
relations which are generated by the relationship between our perceptive
system and the different distances we share with others in our environment,
virtual proximity differs quite a bit. Even though proximity is a spatial
term, virtual proximity takes place in a non-space which is the web, and is
a system of affiliations generated by the relationship between our percep-
tive system and the cues emitted to us by the communicational mediums we are
using. Moving from one to the other is able to adjust our natural perceptu-
al process and therefore the established spatial relations we call proxim-
ity zones. Consequently the way we conduct ourselves, collaborate and com-
municate, understand ourselves within our surrounding space and develop an
awareness in order to be productive, all these acts are filtered by a new
set of rules and conventions.

Is transitioning from a physical to a virtual closeness compromising the way
we act individually and collectively in order to produce and communicate?
Or is it liberating us from the inevitable boundaries our physicality lays
on us? The answer to these questions are relative and probably both contain
a level of truth. However this paper argues that sharing social settings in
physical space engages people in a common perceptive system creating more
fruitful conditions for a satisfactory performance.