TRANSITIONING FROM PHYSICAL TO VIRTUAL SPATIAL PROXIMITY
THE EFFECT ON PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY OFFICE

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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 construction 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 conditions. Labor is the first body which is being subjected to austerity and is inevitably facing instability, insecurity, temporary or part-time employment and migration as some of the effects of the crisis.

From a more tangible point of view, apart from the decrease in wages, physical 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 naturally incurs, such as time and space limits. This often makes physical presence unnecessary, which is a momentous revelation since it questions our materiality, 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 slowly 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 perceptive 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 perceptual process and therefore the established spatial relations we call proximity zones. Consequently the way we conduct ourselves, collaborate and communicate, 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.