



Offices that adapt like a chameleon

What will the office of the future look like? With “Meet2Create” researchers from Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts are looking to solve questions like this.

TEXT: Reto Zanettin / PICTURES: HSLU

A quarter of Switzerland’s employees regularly work remotely. Many have days where they work from home; some work at another branch, the customer’s premises or on the go, as the study SwissFlexWork 2014 conducted by the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland reveals. One of the challenges of mobile and flexible work is to find the right environment for each task. Writing reports and concepts or compiling presentations requires quiet zones. Brainstorming and discussion sessions, on the other hand, need rooms that encourage creativity and teamwork. This is precisely where the Competence Center Typology & Planning in Architecture (CCTP) at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Engineering & Architecture (HSLU) comes in: At NEST, its researchers have now realized a “human office”, where the impact of novel office spaces can be tested in practice.

From innovation process to interior design

“The office of the future will be centered on the topics variety, appropriation, comfort, diversity, exchange and encounter,” says project head Sybilla Amstutz. “It will be capable of adapting to the needs and activities of the users.” For the conception, the developers of Meet2Create began with a typical innovation process. In order to allow an idea to mature, evolutionary mechanisms are required – just like in nature: “variation”, “selection” and “stabilization”. The scientists assigned these three mechanisms typical tasks that need to be performed in an office. Brainstorming and exchange for example, belong to “variation”, presentations and discussions take place in “selection” and individual work ranks among “stabilization”. In the Meet2Create unit, three work zones called “Hybrid”, “In-Out” and “Cocoon” correspond to these mechanisms.

In “Hybrid”, people are supposed to express themselves creatively and develop projects; in other words: perform “variation” tasks, such as brainstorming, discussions or finding solutions. Consequently, the facility is designed for a high degree of flexibility: tables, chairs and presentation areas can be organized and moved around as and when needed. Through “Hybrid”, the researchers are looking to gain insights into how spaces can be redesigned and used purpose specific. Additionally the project aims to continually develop furniture for the office of the future.

Naturally created indoor climate

The “In-Out” section based on the evolutionary mechanism “selection” is also geared towards collaboration. Project members meet to present, adapt and prioritize concepts – or have an informal chat. In this zone, no heating, ventilation or air conditioning was installed. Only the room structure, the façade construction, a latent heat storage unit, materials such as wood and textiles, and plants regulate the indoor climate. This design is to demonstrate how temperature, air humidity or even the oxygen balance can be maintained at a performance-enhancing level with passive building technology.

In the “Cocoon” zone, considerations on the evolutionary mechanism “stabilization” are expressed. Individual work and a high degree of privacy are just as possible as focused collaboration. Every user can personalize their own work space, such as by setting the light and temperature according to their individual preferences. And anyone who wants to retreat can sit down in the bay embedded between “Cocoon’s” individual and teamwork stations. The experts expect “Cocoon” to yield insights into how the need for privacy while performing tasks can also be fulfilled in open-plan offices. //



Left

In the “Cocoon” zone, the room layout and individually customizable work stations allow both team and individual work. The experiences with this concept will be channeled into the architecture of open-plan offices.

Right

A model of Meet2Create’s interior architecture.