



Collin Macgadie from BDG

BRICKS, BYTES AND BEHAVIOUR

Modern European cities are leading the way in terms of change. Innovative city planning is a key part of the solution in creating more sustainable forms of urban living – and the Spanish heavyweight cities in particular are at the forefront of this endeavour, report our Spanish correspondent, Esme Banks-Marr.

Madrid is addressing its civic challenges with a huge digital project to connect and monitor its public services and maintenance – and also plans to ban all diesel cars by 2025. Indeed, Madrid has been hailed as one of the most sustainable cities in the world. It seemed only fitting that the Spanish edition of WorkTech, a forum that aims to unite all those involved in the future of work and the workplace, found its home in the country's pioneering capital, a place that's so hung up on future proofing. Delegates found a home in Castellana 81; a landmark skyscraper in Madrid's modern cityscape and a reference point for 20th Century Spanish architecture that now looks to the future as a symbol of sustainability, accessibility and technology.

BRICKS

Keynote speaker, Martha Thorne, Dean of the IE School of Architecture and Design, commenced by drawing attention to the needs of the occupier. She also quickly pinpointed the fact that 'disruption' seemed to be the favourite word of the day – a correct observation. The idea of disrupting, or stopping something from continuing as usual (or as expected), leads to the fact we should create change; we should change how we operate and find new and more effective ways of doing things. This made a very apt foundation for what then turned into an entire run-down and reflection of workplace architectural design and innovation since the beginning of the 20th century.

The Wainwright Building in St Louis Missouri, for example, is widely considered

one of the first skyscrapers and first true office buildings. It had what we now think of as a typical layout. However, with such a large interior, the windows could be bigger, meaning the walls could be thinner. She went on to pinpoint other architectural wonders, such as the Larkin Building in Buffalo New

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York – designed in 1903 by Frank Lloyd Wright, who ingeniously conceived that the walls and furniture could absorb noise made by the machinery in the nearby factory.

Martha then briefly covered the Taylorist office and factory-esque open plan offices, The Johnson Wax Building, the 1950/60's modernist embrace in Europe, the Herman Miller action office, Henry Dreyfus and the publication of the 'Humanscale Manual' and 'Measure of a Man and Woman', the 1980's and executive cubicles and into the 2000's. Here,

she digressed, was when we really started wanting the next 'big thing' in workplace – whatever it was that could foster creativity and innovation. Martha believes we didn't start getting it right until the beginning of the last decade.

Enter the current day and the influence of hospitality on our workplaces, increased awareness of sustainability in design, flexible furniture and the myriad of options when it comes to work 'places'. Martha ended on the question of whether we really need to keep striving for offices that can do everything. She stated one thing for sure, that the war for talent has such an impact on us now. To attract the best people, environments need to stand out – and not only aesthetically, but also as places where work works.

Other 'brick' contributors included Colin Macgadie and Irene Guerra Gomez, of BDG architecture + design – who discussed BDG's mantra and approach with the impressive and ongoing regeneration and design of Telefonica's HQ in Madrid, the largest project in BDG's portfolio. Ulrich Blum, Associate at Zaha Hadid Architects, discussed the fact that the practice has completed more office projects in recent years, including the Central Bank of Iraq and the BMW Building in Leipzig, Germany, and as a consequence started creating a dedicated workplace team 18 months ago. The illustrious collective of architects is currently using coding to measure the distance between desks and other spaces in the workplace – comparing and contrasting the data to create spaces that are more 'organic'.

BYTES

UnGroup CEO, Philip Ross, appropriately took to the stage to discuss the 'app centric workplace' and workplace analytics. Philip believes we have to tear down familiar organisational structures and build them up again, based on fluidity. He not only explained but educated delegates on the fact that there are now apps for everything to do with workplace, from apps to support car-pooling and concierge services, through to apps that facilitate lunch meetings and (oxymoronically) engineer serendipitous gatherings.

Philip reiterated that we are seeing the beginning of apps moving away from people and place, but into actual knowledge management.

Juan Antonio Casado, Head of Technology at Accenture, elaborated and developed on Philip's thinking that technology can actually improve spaces. He expressed the need for hybrid spaces, as humans can't physically see the border between the digital and physical world.

Ralph Hearnshaw, Commercial Director at Bisley, then explained the company's history, outlining how Bisley has impressively managed to stay relevant, adapting its work around personal storage from the previous business model founded on (now increasingly obsolete) paper filing.

BEHAVIOUR

Moving into the final section of the day, we caught up with our old friend, Oliver Heath, Design Ambassador for Interface and founder of Oliver Heath Design. A recognised expert in the field of sustainable architectural and interior design, Oliver asked the audience to think of a space in which they felt relaxed, calm and happy. Most people envisaged somewhere with natural light, greenery and water. Not surprisingly, nobody described their office. Biophilia is definitely on-trend; perhaps that's why we spend a whopping 90% of our lives in doors. Since so much of that time is spent at work, it's key that we feel as peaceful

and relaxed as we can there – enough so that we can do our work effectively. When put like that, all the 'hype' is well and truly justified.

As work evolves at higher rates of change between sectors, locations, activities and skill requirements, many workers will need help adjusting. As ever, we're being encouraged to put the actual workforce first; adopting and adapting the people-centric approach to everything – particularly the incorporation of technology. Technology may be the enabler – but in fact it's the data we're now armed with, as a result of that tech, that's inevitably leading, or set to lead, the future of work.



Philip Ross from UnGroup



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