

Holland is not flat

Somewhere in the north, a group of people only work four days a week and focuses on quality of life and the balance between private and professional spheres. According to the tradition of the Polder Model, employees, governments, businesses and political, social and economic actors contribute to reinvent organizational forms and workspaces. They talk openly of productivity, performance, they develop tools to measure employee satisfaction, productivity and labor costs associated with work environments. It does not occur to anyone to dump the most employees in the minimum square meters. Organizations and public and private bodies conduct or fund studies and advanced research to innovate in the design and organization of work spaces. This is not about furniture, or painting the walls in orange or smoking pot in the office. It is about placing the human being first and allow him to work under optimum conditions. Really.

In a few recent articles, sites or brochures of management consultancies in France, working space brings together the most insane fantasies regarding economics, management and survival. There is a magical cocktail mixing reduction of square meters, crowded bench-desks and non attributed workstations, which is presented as a powerful management (and change management) tool. But the question of the relationship between work organization, processes and space is not addressed. Measuring the impact of a new way of working on the performance of employees or on their level of satisfaction seems to be an exotic concern. Eventually, a report will be commissioned to a psychiatrist about the stress and psychosocial risks, or the open space will be satirized instead of the decision-makers. However, a few hours of Thalys away, however, the Netherland works collectively to design and implement amazing initiatives and solutions. It is not fair to pretend that the Dutch are the champions of teleworking in Europe because they are looking for a panacea to the endless congestion of traffic lanes (or because the new technologies of information and communication allow to remote working). Nor is it fair to claim that the Dutch spaces are comfortable because it is raining outside. In Holland, an open space is not a hen-house. This is a qualitative and spacious environment, offering a variety of spaces according to your activities, the way you work, your mood or your preference. It is not about designing serviced facilities or substitutes to domestic spaces. The introduction of new information and communication technologies (allowing you to choose when and where you want to work) has made it possible to introduce flexible ways of working and flexible use of diverse spaces. Within them, a large proportion of spaces is allocated to informal zones, to support informal exchanges and social networks. According to Juriaan van Meel (consultant in organization and workspaces at Icop and author of The European Office) "A typical flexible office offers a variety of spaces and areas. Employees can freely choose the best space suited to their task. Workstations in open spaces, enclosed offices if they need isolation for concentration, focus of confidentiality; formal meeting rooms, touch-down spots to simply drop-by and check mails, project rooms, and social spaces for discussion, exchanges and conviviality.

The “New Ways of Working” are all but a mere rationalization of square meters, they are truly about optimizing resources in a way that shall not affect the satisfaction and motivation of staff. By the early 1990’s, various types of flexible spaces were introduced, either in ministries or public bodies such as the Dynamic Office, Ministry of Public Works in Haarlem or in banks (ABN-Amro in Breda) or in the insurance sector (Interpolis at Tillburg, designed by the Veldhoen agency). What distinguishes the Dutch is certainly that they require on the one hand any new way of working and environment shall demonstrate its efficiency and effectiveness in a scientific way. And on the other hand that all employees be involved and be consulted in any project concerning the work environment. As Wim Pullen, Director and Researcher of the Center for People and Buildings states it, “it is about taking into account the views of users, as well as the organizational requirements and also to rely on the key role of middle management. It is considered essential to assess and measure whether people work better, if they are more efficient, more productive and happier while exercising strict control over the purse strings. The principle is to improve performance and satisfaction while reducing costs. In a reference book written in 2003 by Theo van der Voordt, Costs and benefits of innovative workplace design, organizations that have introduced the flexible working concepts and flexible spaces are evaluated in order to answer to multiple questions. Are the feedback are positive? Are the objectives for a project achieved? What are the risks? What is known about the effects? What are the lessons for the management? What needs to be changed, improved and how? In the Netherlands, there exist an impressive body of studies, research, tools and techniques for standardized evaluations of multidisciplinary projects, in depth thematic monographs and databases of projects and innovative work spaces. The results of studies emphasize that the flexible working and spaces are widely perceived in a positive way. Critics concern generally a lack of privacy and a lack of solutions for activities that require concentration. But most importantly, what is at stake is the adequacy of the organizational mode (the management, processes and activities, the corporate culture) and work environments.

"Beware of the Design Trick" (designating trendy colorful offices) told us in particular Hans Topée, a consultant specialized in planning and facility management. The Design Trick is about copying and pasting a funky space concept on an organization without taking into account the specific work processes, the user needs and corporate culture of that organization. By walking in the premises of Unilever De Brug, what was fascinating was how the work environment (beyond its aesthetic qualities and its spectacular architecture) is designed to service the users and support their ways of working and their preferences. The success of environment is the tremendous capacity of management and facility management to enable users to customize and organize their environment at will, between packaging, products, models,

posters and inspiring objects. These are indeed spaces to live in freedom, they are lively, animated and fantastically human. Like many recent achievements in the Netherlands, the working environment of Unilever embodies a number of dynamic and positive attitudes. Among these we find an open mind and enthusiasm for change, a remarkable ability to respond to ever-changing social, economic and society trends. There is also a propensity to experiment with new organizational forms, to use technological innovation, and improve society as a whole (throughout businesses, schools, government bodies and hospitals). The Dutch are eager and keen to anticipate, innovate, experiment, rather than react, drag their feet and adapt in a hurry without leeway. Henny van Egmond for example is working two days a week for Rabobank and the rest of the time is dedicated to his own company (change management and communication), to his family and his leisure. Yet he is responsible for a major project: the Rabobank Unplugged Program. This name refers to the famous show of the MTV music channel, where artists perform their tracks live with acoustic instruments without being connected to a sound system or a fixed and static synthesizer (which is not unlike the employee committed at work). The Rabobank Unplugged program is a radical departure / journey for the company, its clients, its business, its culture, its ways of working and its spaces. Unplugged is a voluntary program! If you want to work Unplugged, that is freely choose where, when and how you want to perform your job, you will be fully accompanied and supported this approach. First in terms of management by objectives - based on trust - and then in terms of tools to enable remote work and collaborative space offering new functions. So if you want to come to the Unplugged space, be it for an individual activity or to work with your colleagues, welcome your clients and suppliers (or simply to meet people and exchange informally) this program is for you. It is really about empowering people and delegate them the ability to make decisions about their business, their working environment and give them maximum autonomy. Under obvious condition that they are to perform and meet their objectives. Such a program can only be implemented in the extent that employees are fully aware about their duties : they are responsible as to how they organize their work, how they reconcile work and private life, and find the optimal balance - while contributing to the creation of added value for the company. By offering such autonomy and working conditions, Rabobank indisputably places the well-being and satisfaction of employees first. An attractive and challenging program which we will definitely keep an eye on, especially as a new headquarters will be delivered next year.

The New World of Work

Like Interpolis few years ago, Microsoft leads the way in terms of innovative

ways of working and associated work areas. Initially, a white paper by Bill Gates, in May 2005 to the annual Microsoft conference for the CEOs of the top 1000 global companies, on the theme Pathways to Growth - The New World of Work. The vision of Bill Gates is that the growth and survival of businesses will require increased autonomy for the knowledge workers in the conduct of their activities and by making advanced tools available to them so that they can be more productive and efficient. As explained by Hans van der Meer, Marketing Manager of Microsoft Netherlands, Bill Gates 's vision is a Microsoftian vision of the working world where businesses secure competitiveness through a platform incorporating three dimensions : the organization (management, human resources), information and communication technology (Microsoft software for collaboration, working in project mode, management of agenda, analysis and presentation of data) and the physical environment (work spaces). Opened in the fall 2008, this total environment (whose interior design was entrusted to the architect Sevil Peach) differs radically from the spaces of the parent company in Redmond, where cubicles line up close to enclosed office and where the allocation of space remains still linked to the status and rank. Located close to Schiphol Airport, the new environment has no provision for owned workstation or enclosed office, or any organization and allocation of space in terms of services or departments. The 900 Microsoft employees are free to work wherever, whenever and however they see fit. More than 700 visitors and customers a week are discovering this New World of Work platform and experiment the three dimensional combination (organizational mode, technology and space).

The physical environment is deploying an impressive array of formal and informal spaces, many of which are related to a concept of continuous catering and snacking or food. The reception is a bit of a trendy cafe-lounge bar with its fresh fruit juice counter, the most numerous workstations are square tables surrounded by high back rest partitions (which would nicely blend in the lounge of an hotel or an exclusive club), or sofas and soft chairs and cosy armchairs. Tea houses are scattered here and there in an atrium to benefit from brainstorming while in natural light and the famous Luxembourg chairs invite you to relax or to make strategic decisions under the best pre-requisite. The quality of food deserves a mention, (especially for French people always distrustful) and baskets of fruit are like growing everywhere. This is a fantastic tool for marketing and communication of a software company- whose products are indeed relevant to remote working and allow the people to work wherever they want, at home, in the office, at a client or on the go. But more fundamentally, it is also about a software that will allow anyone to locate someone else in the building or elsewhere. The CEO himself had no office whatsoever and all employees are required to keep their schedule up to date and visible to everyone. So that they can meet and coordinate discussions and exchanges. If an employee decides to come to the site to work the next day, he can check if another colleague will also be there and therefore he will not miss an opportunity

to exchange information or advice. This freedom to work wherever and whenever you want, and to lead a fulfilling life comes naturally with a management by objectives and trust and not a management by presence. Welcome to the Microsoft way of life. Thanks to Microsoft, one can realize his potential, balance professional and private life, organize his life freely. It is possible to avoid spending every day at the office from 9 am to 5 hours in order to evolve towards a different way of living and working. Obviously, managing the transition is not an easy deal, as well as managing changes in attitudes and behavior, because even in a more outspoken culture (and also more focused on transparency) it is not that straightforward to open and share one own's agenda and give up one own's enclosed office. It requires indeed coaching and support. Another key success factor for success is the buy-in and the evolution of the management style, particularly with regard to the middle management. The quality of the physical environment quality and related services, (designed to attract and retain the most talented employees), the diversity of spaces, the autonomy /empowerment make the choice easy. As regards the surfaces, the result if applied a classic ratio of sqm per employee, it would be 12 sqm per person, compared with an average ratio of 18-20 sqm in the software industry in Holland, (the previous Microsoft offices provided 20 sqm per person). But in reality, since employees have more spaces at their disposal (which are more comfortable, more spacious and more functional), they operate at will in an office of 11 000 sqm. Several suites (private and multi-functional) can be booked for different durations for groups, teams, projects or working sessions. Microsoft Holland clearly holds the lead in becoming the environment of the decade, if not dethroning Google in the race to attract and retain talent.

The Polder Model and participation

In these times of gloomy economic climate, we can wonder about a whole country about to blow the organizational and spatial frontiers and boundaries. May The New World of Work emerge one day in France ? And may it outdate the management by presence and the design of spaces reflecting the status and organizational rank ? The French Facility directors and facility managers can rest assured. This is only possible in the very specific context of the north European cultures. Holland indeed belongs to the small group composed of the Scandinavian countries, whose cultural profile provides an interesting combination of low hierarchical distance, individualism and femininity. Unlike the so-called "masculine" cultures that praise succeeding your professional career and high professional achievements, rather than the pursuit of happiness, "feminine" cultures value the quality of life, personal growth and praise the family first and caring for others. The upbringing of children values and develops from an early age the autonomy, independence and accountability: it is not about becoming the best student in the class, but do your best. It is about not to sticking out and not humiliating others by your position or the level of your bank

account. Around the table (and it is no coincidence that many meeting tables are round) everyone is equal, everyone gives his opinion and has the right (even the duty) to speak up. Juanita Wijnands and Yolande Slotboom, management consultants in intercultural matters at Ideas 4, emphasize that regarding the organization of collective life, the opinion of the cleaning lady counts as much as the boss, and if that he fails repeatedly to greet the person who prepares the coffee, he can not be sure to find a comforting cup on his desk when he arrives the following day. Nor is it acceptable to summon a person to remain silent or to prevent her from giving her opinion. There it is, the famous Polder Model, based on broad consultation, consensus and negotiation. To survive in an hostile environment where the priority was to keep your feet dry, requires the participation of everyone and mutual assistance ! Since then, everyone has a voice when it comes to participate in the organization of this small territory. Adding for good measure a few pinches of Calvinism and you have the portrait of a nation where everyone has an opinion (and where there are 40 words to criticize). Applied in the work environment, this translates into a decision-making process that calls for the participation at different levels, by a management whose role it is to ensure that employees are the most satisfied with their working conditions. And beware if the tools and equipments are not up to expectations and requirements. Similarly, signs of status and hierarchy are prohibited. A director or manager does not necessarily own an enclosed office with a warden secretary at the entrance. The assistants are installed nearest to windows with breathtaking views, in spacious rooms with comfortable workstations, adjustable height, because of their multiple activities, coordination, consolidation, transmission, archiving (as well as the volume of documents) required . It is not easy to read in the space where the boss sits. A manager can easily be installed among the members of his team and have a desk of the same size. As Michael Troost, country manager of Vitra Holland, puts it, "I may be the manager, but I am also one of the guys". This is about leveling, showing modesty and frugality (the manager has a meeting table instead of an imposing desk, complete with a small sized workstation in a corner of the room, placed beside the window). It is not uncommon to use the boss office as a meeting room when he is not there. The Polder Model is participatory and egalitarian. It is deeply rooted in a culture where work is a way to enlightenment happiness and not about defining your worth or climb a social ladder. You do not live to work, you work to live well: the Dutch do not live to work and make a career but work to enjoy life. No wonder that the highest proportion in Europe of people working part-time can be found there. Praising the work / life balance, putting the private sphere first, spending time with your children - whether you are a father or a mother – organizing your life in the most practical and enjoyable manner as possible. It is a way of life. And this quality of life is not a utopia. A flat land ? flat organigrams ? A participative decision making process? In Holland it is normal to work together, to collaborate, to listen and help each other. And it is frowned upon to profit from the work of others or to focus exclusively on personal

success and career.

On the proper depth of the buildings

Beyond the common sense questions about the relevance of a new way of working or a new space, what about the design of buildings, or even the necessity of a workplace ? What types of buildings will be required by the organizations in the future ? For Philip Tidd, director of DEGW, the classic frame still used in the Netherlands shows that developers and builders are way behind. They keep building 14.4 meter deep boxes, while the end user could wish a depth of 18, 20 or 24 meters. He rightly points at which depths would be best in terms of flexibility. Thus a variety of depths would allow more diverse workplace designs and also would make it possible to better take into account the needs of evolving users and organizations. A vibrant community of consultants specialized in organization and management are working together with architects to design briefs, specifications and environments that are more flexible and able to support constantly changing organizations (for example, intensifying the use of space, promoting different ways of working, while always ensuring the well-being of employees). Organizations reinvent themselves so quickly that workplace consultants, architects and developers are designing buildings from the inside out, starting first and foremost with the needs of users. This involves focusing on how people actually work, how they would like to work and how they can enjoy and blossom in their working environment. As Michael Muij (consultant in organization and work spaces at Proven Workspace) puts it, functions are driven by people. ("function follows people", replaces the famous "form follows function"). Like the remarkable realizations of the Rijkswaterstaat (in Utrecht) by the architectural practice Cepezed or the "UFO" kind of spatial vessel of the developer and builder OVG gently landed on the roof of a former building. Designed by the architects Diederik Fokkema and Laura Atsma, it provides an epitome of a stunning environment, spacious, with exceptional functional and aesthetic qualities. Panoramic breathtaking views, pure and clear lines, elegant spaces offer absolute "refinement" in every detail, whether the leather upholstery of some partitions and furniture, the sand and beige harmonies, or privacy and generosity of workstations. The meeting rooms located in the lateral curve are dramatically beautiful, with the view of the bridge of Rotterdam and the buildings of Rem Koolhaas and Renzo Piano, and also by their interior architecture. The allocation of space favors informal spaces, including a hybrid welcoming space pouring hospitality and "art de recevoir", including a magnificent built-in wall-kitchen, sofas and meridians, a long table that can accommodate over 20 persons, plus an adjacent cosy "salon" offering a subtle privacy for confidential talks or just to relax, while leafing through some books surrounded by a soft halo of jazzy notes. An employee who is offered such working conditions of work can not help feeling valued and recognized. And will not fail to deliver his very best performance. Treating your employees as

persons goes beyond a way of working and inevitably impact the relationship with your customers. Respect for anyone is respect for everyone, so that the company can thrive and secure its performance, excellence and sustainability.

On hospitality

While business lunches and seminars are often an excuse to leave the office premises, the Dutch advocate a concept of hospitality which is truly original. Indeed, many new workplace concepts associate catering / food and spaces. It is not simply to retain employees on site so that they eat quickly and return to their desks. It is about supporting and stimulating exchanges, whether formal or informal, to innovate and work better together. Thus user-friendly areas are created to be the heart of social networks, to bring together members of different teams or services, as well as free-lance and clients. Among the consultants of The House of Performance, the director Arjon van Lieshout has revamped the whole attic of a former courthouse into a welcoming, cosy and bright space. Under an hybrid roof, half tiled, half-sky windows, a professional kitchen and a huge dinner table have been installed, to entertain, to delight collaborators and clients and to create a privileged experience and relationship. At D-Dock, a young dynamic architecture and design practice, an attic flooded by natural light provides an ideal setting to meet, relax, keep abreast of the latest projects, or inspire each other. The same goes for the consultants of the workplace design agency Rietmeijer, where the ground level is the social the heart of the company totally dedicated to welcome, to exchange and to meet, in an agreeable and amicable way. As Peter Vink and Liesbeth Groenesteijn (Researchers in the Department of Ergonomics and Innovation "of the TNO Research Institute, whose mission is to increase the potential for innovation in industry and public sector) stated, studies show that 85% of conversations around the coffee machine are about work. Around a glass, a cappuccino, a fruit basket and sweets, we are more inclined to solve problems and make things happen or take them further. And what about luminous spaces, where you literally bathe in the light. As Salla Lardot, architect and consultant for DEGW, poetically pointed it, "As you go up north, for us the light is holy." In the same vein, Ruud van Wezel, director of the Facility Management of the Polytechnic of The Hague (with a rare engineer & anthropologist profile) stresses an increasing awareness of the multi-sensorial aspects of the work environment. More and more new agencies include scents, sounds and tastes in the design of new environments. So that people will feel good, in a space that you can make your own, because it is tailored to your needs, your style of work, your feelings, your state of mind. Numerous workplaces offer an array of atmospheres, different moods, original furniture, art or unusual objects. A variety of spaces truly embodies the possibility of choice ! And it is not uncommon that several interior designers - led by one of their peers - are involved in the same project, each designing a different different floor or areas. When you create atmospheres conducive to

better cooperation or a better performance, it also enable you to receive clients in your own branding universe and beyond confidentiality, it affects them sensorially and emotionally and helps shaping a particular relationship with them. A little glimpse of “why don’t you come back” ! In addition, many of our interviewees emphasized that a meaningful indicator of a successful workplace project is the number of mails received per day: if it decreases, it might indicate that the informal interactions, direct contacts and exchanges have increased ! And this return of the “eye – mail” prior the e-mail (e-mail in sight) is about saving time and multiplying ideas !

Being together to share and to learn

For those who may fear that the transformation of workplaces rhymes with relaxation and social links, current questions and thinking focus on methodologies to measure the impact of the physical workplace on performance. Jan-Peter Kastelein, partner and workplace strategist at YNNO, a consultancy firm on new ways of working (also lecturer and researcher at Nyenrode Business University) is currently working on creating methodologies to measure the impact of the workplace on knowledge sharing and learning behavior. His fields of study include professional service companies, as well as hospitals and schools. And Jan-Peter Kastelein emphasizes the rare conviction that *“people who do not think that coming in the office for work is critical do not understand what learning is about”*. *To learn, to think, to transmit knowledge, and particularly tacit knowledge, we must be together. Physically together.* It is about awareness, access to networks, engagement and trust. By being together, we become aware of others, of their work and of the knowledge they have. We access informal social and organizational networks, as well as data and information. We mark our engagement, our commitment in our behavior, regarding the processes, the corporate culture, and our willingness to share. And finally we develop trust and trusting relationship without which we would not be able to collaborate and be innovative. In its own way, YNNO studied in detail the relevance of the Japanese model of knowledge creation and sharing, the SECI model (see O & C N ° 9.) And they created an innovative workplace setting integrating a space to brainstorm (combination), a lecture room (externalization), a comfortable living room (socialization) and a Zen-inspired garden for reflection and meditation (internalization).

Here is a country where people experiment with new ways of working, new spaces and measure their impact. Where a feasibility study is not forcing as many persons as possible in a small number of sqm. In Holland, employees are not treated like idiots by offering to them to participate only in the decoration of the coffee corner coffee or the choice of their own green plant. Designing a work environment is first and foremost about the people who will live in there. It means taking into account mental, social, virtual and physical dimensions. It

builds on including employees in the design of their work spaces and be attentive to their needs. As stated by Frederik van Steenbergen, also consultant with Ynno, it is essential to include employees as early as possible in the design process. It is also essential to clarify the original vision of the top management, to validate the objectives and confront managers with the reality along the workplace project. And a workplace project does not end with moving in. Actually, it is from that very moment that it really begins. And one can never stress enough the crucial role of the middle management, who has to adopt a management style by objectives and trust, and relinquish the role of commander-controller to rise up to a leader-facilitator. Of course, involving users in the workplace design is part of the any process fostering change and is far from being easy. But it is much more complex to make the right (informed) decisions as regards the work environment and ensure they will be beneficial to both the organizations and the employees. And make everybody happy. It is about people. The Dutch have definitely GOOD TASTE. For Space.

Francoise Bronner & Kitty De Groot