

IZABELA PIKLIKIEWICZ-KĘSICKA

ORCID: 0000-0002-5370-9027

Poznan University of Technology, Poland

AN EASY LIE OF OFFICE ARCHITECTURE

ŁATWE KŁAMSTWO ARCHITEKTURY BIUROWEJ

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present contemporary methods of stylizing office space interiors into playful zones. The subject of the research is the search for the causes of such activities whose effects are on the borderline between kitsch and genius. The analyses were based on the methods of literature research, inventories and background survey. The results of the research show the truth and the lie about Polish office spaces.

Keywords: office architecture, play and work, creative workplace

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie współczesnych metod stylizacji wnętrz przestrzeni biurowych na strefy kojarzone z zabawą. Tematem badań jest poszukiwanie przyczyn takich działań, których efekty stoją na pograniczu kiczu i geniuszu. Przeprowadzone analizy oparte zostały na metodach badań literaturowych, inwentaryzacyjnych i wywiadach środowiskowych. Wyniki badań obrazują prawdę i kłamstwo o polskich przestrzeniach zabawy w biurach.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura biurowa, play and work, kreatywne miejsce pracy

1. INTRODUCTION

Architectural design is constantly changing. Changes are generated by the desire to improve architectural buildings and interiors and by the changing needs of users over time. This is particularly noticeable in the design of public and semi-public spaces. These include office architecture. These changes can be noticed by two groups of users, which makes them reach a wider audience more quickly. One of these groups are office workers, who are regular users of office space. The second are customers or associates whose office space should encourage the establishment and maintenance of professional cooperation. Office interiors must meet the utility needs of both groups. There are also greater expectations of the office buildings. Often these objects, through their external and internal creation, should emanate in a way that emphasizes the strong and stable position of the company in the economic market. They can even be expected to influence the subconsciousness of customers and employees in order to build confidence in the credible and serious activity that the company offers. But the last decade seems to have broken this belief. Observing for example the office buildings of the giant foreign IT market, one can see interiors that at first glance cannot be associated with the workspace. Google's office buildings are filled with spaces equipped with installations and devices that are rather reminiscent of a playground, amusement park or computer game room.

Moreover, in some office buildings there is even a spa area for employees. For tired employees of the company, there are even rooms for naps or devices dedicated to taking a nap at work. It is questionable whether such a physical environment is conducive to working conditions and processes? The question seems all the more important if we take into account the fact that Polish office architecture follows foreign trends.

1.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research presented in the article is to show zones in Polish and foreign office architecture which balance on the border of kitsch and genius in the process of shaping the work environment. At first sight they are associated with fun. Some of them may refer to a design trend called play and work.¹ Are they only a function of breaking the standards of office architecture design or do they also have some utility functions? What are they located in office buildings for? They have a negative impact on work processes, or maybe the opposite? However, the most important is the issue of examining the discussed situation in the Polish conditions. Is the location of play areas in Polish office buildings successful? What do the employees think about them? Does following foreign trends in this respect guarantee success for Polish companies or is it just an easy lie about innovation and modernity?

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out using literature research related to the creation of a database on foreign office buildings of companies that dominate the international or domestic economic market. After collecting information on the controversial directions of designing foreign office architecture, an inventory survey of Polish office buildings was conducted. To supplement the information on Polish objects, literature research was also conducted. Environmental interviews were conducted with Polish employees and entrepreneurs. The research started in 2017 and is still ongoing. The results of the research are intended to attempt to present the opinions of employees about the space in question. Thanks to the results of the study, an attempt was made to establish the truth about modern Polish office architecture.

2. KITSCH OR PROGRESSIVE OFFICE ARCHITECTURE?

Comfort and efficiency of work has always been an overriding goal to be achieved by office buildings built around the world. And certainly, this issue appeared when creating new works of office architecture as one of the main interpretations of the appearance and functional layout of a given project. The arguments related to the influence of architecture on the effective working environment were supposed to convince both investors and employees of the rightness of the work that the architect created. Today it is already known that some of them turned out to be lies. One such example is once very popular open space office buildings. The giant open space was to facilitate the organization of the space by eliminating architectural barriers such as walls. Initially, it was believed to be a literal symbol of openness which

¹ S. Brown, C. Vaughan, *Play. How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and invigorates the Soul*, Avery, New York 2009.

makes cooperation easier for employees and guarantees them direct contact. Such space also made it easier to control everyone working in the building. Like an unlimited space, it was possible to check the progress of a large number of people at one time. The passage of time verified the functionality of open space office buildings in terms of working comfort. Spaces of this type generated an enormous amount of noise, encouraged distraction and had a negative impact on the quality of work.² Contemporary office architecture also uses open spaces, however, they are much smaller and usually mixed with different functional layouts used in such buildings. The passage of time in this case not only verified the lie about the openness of the office space, but also learned from it and used it to create a compromise that seems to meet its original assumptions. Perhaps a similar scenario will be developed for play and work spaces. The idea of this type of work is to combine fun and work. In order to understand the concept of the play and work buildings, it is important to analyse what the effects of participating in play can be. One of the goals is certainly building a positive attitude in the working environment. The actions performed during the game evoke amusement and cheerfulness. They also generate enthusiasm and encourage interaction with other employees. These are some of the aims and objectives of play and work office spaces. Thus, one can deduce from the narrative for office interiors inspired by popular places connected with fun. In some office interiors there is a literal attempt to adapt elements of the amusement park to the working space (Ill. 1).



Ill. 1. Interior of the Singtel Office building in Singapore. Source: www.contemporist.com (10.6.2020)

Such treatments are also noticeable in Polish office architecture. However, the boldness of the arrangements of Polish offices does not seem to be an attempt to adapt the play space in

² G.W. Evans, D. Johnson, *Stress and Open-Office Noise*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2000, vol. 85, no. 5, pp. 779–783.

a way similar to foreign offices. However, this is an attempt to imitate the trends and design directions used in the office buildings of well-known companies. The way of literally transferring the styles and arrangements observed in office buildings such as Google does not always end in success. Perhaps the cultural context should also be taken into account. Capitalism in Poland has a relatively short history compared to foreign countries such as the United States of America. One of the historical consequences is certainly the attitude to work. However, the important aspect is whether the play areas in Polish offices are actually used in the same way as in foreign offices? Are they perceived by Polish employees as elements of kitsch or maybe they can actually be used to improve the work environment?

2.1 PLAY AND WORK OR JUST PLAY?

Infor Polska office in 2019 was appointed the best office in Lower Silesia.³ The functional layout of the office is based on open space, but it is balanced and divided into different functional zones. In the office building there are muted areas probably intended for individual conversations or teleconferences. In the building there is located a brain storm room. There is also no shortage of conference rooms of different sizes which can be used according to current demand. The office building has a social zone in the form of a kitchen and bar table. The space seems to be balanced. One of the zones is particularly striking. This is a chill out zone. Fenced off by vertical partitions, it is equipped with cushions associated with the equipment of the children's room rather than the workstation. In the chill area there are large screens which are certainly multifunctional. Chill out spaces are one of the most popular types of spaces that have adapted to Polish conditions. Unlimited possibilities related to the way of location, size adjustment and variety of equipment make it easy to adapt to almost every office. Similar zones can be observed in office buildings such as Google, eBay or Lego. Are these areas just for fun and relaxation? This is a debatable issue and depends on many factors. It is certainly important how the effects of work are expected to be achieved and for which employees the space is dedicated. The chill out zone can be very useful for individual and creative work.⁴ An employee performing the above-mentioned mode of work is characterized by the need to search for new solutions to the problem under investigation. Such work processes are supported by providing incentives to act and stimulate thinking. A chill out space, properly equipped and designed, can provide a plane for delivering such stimuli.

2.2 AN EASY LIE OR INSPIRATION FROM FOREIGN TRENDS IN OFFICE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN?

The typology of space initiated in the design of play and work type offices is constantly evolving and is formulated differently in the architectural context.⁵ The mode of work that combines fun and work can be interpreted differently. The project possibilities are actually

³ R. Zieliński, *Tak wygląda najlepsze biuro we Wrocławiu, laureat konkursu Office Superstar*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 7.10.2019, <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,25281841,tak-wyglada-najlepsze-biu-ro-we-wroclawiu-laureat-konkursu-office.html?disableRedirects=true> (access: 10.6.2020).

⁴ W. Witczak, *Zdolność do ciężkiej pracy umysłowej*, Teka Komisji Prawniczej, 2008, vol. 1, pp. 208–216.

⁵ I. Piklikiewicz-Kęsicka, *Modernity of Workplace Architecture* [in:] *Defining the Architectural Space. Tradition and Modernity in Architecture*, vol. 8, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2019.

limited only by the investor's budget and his preferences as the owner of a given company. Imitation as a form of inspiration and following foreign trends is conditioned by the desire to achieve prestige, high market position and effects of foreign global companies. It is also a way of striving for professional contacts and international cooperation. The implementation of similar working conditions to those prevailing in Asia or the USA are certainly a factor determining whether a given employee will want to build the capital of a Polish company and be a part of its team. This concerns both Polish and foreign employees. In particular, industries based on creative work have the right sectors for finding the right employees for their company. Of course, the working conditions and environment are one of the factors as important as the level of remuneration, the status of the company or its development prospects. As a result, in Polish office buildings can be observed amazing equipment such as slides, jacuzzi or ping-pong tables. But are they located and designed effectively? One of the answers to this question may be a design procedure performed by Apa Smart office building located in Gliwice. The building is to be a symbol of the company's motto – taming of technology. The company is involved in designing intelligent solutions for everyday life activities, safety and improving living comfort. According to the company's assumptions, the office building is equipped with intelligent solutions aimed at improving its users' functioning. One such solution is a developed roof space.⁶ A part of the space is used for recreational purposes, where physical activities for employees are organized. The remaining part was used as a greenhouse for plants, a place for photovoltaic panels and a beehive. It is certainly an element of imitating foreign companies in the directions of ecology and sustainable development. A similar solution, although on an incomparably larger scale, was chosen by The Timberland Company. Timberland cultivates and makes a fruit, vegetable and herb garden available to employees.⁷ The huge space is not located on the roof but on part of the area surrounding the company's office building. Apart from their size and location, these two green spaces definitely differ in the way and purpose of their functioning. Timberland's office gardens are cultivated by company employees. The harvest in the form of vegetables and fruit is partly handed over to the local food bank. The company's aim is to encourage employees to be active and interact with each other, as well as to cultivate their own home gardens. It is certainly a very interesting form of recreation in the open air, as well as an activity according to the assumptions of horticultural therapy. This workplace is certainly distinguished by its innovative thinking about the working environment and work processes. In Apa Smart's office it was decided to use a robot called FarmBot to grow plants in the greenhouse. Employees do not actively participate in planting on the roof of the office. So, what are the benefits of locating this type of greenery in the workplace? In this case, it seems that only the marketing and testing benefits of this type of equipment seem to be in the focus. The benefits for the improvement of the working conditions and environment are limited in this case to a visual appreciation of the effects of the crop. Not only physical changes introduced to Polish offices are a factor that guarantees their innovativeness in the way some foreign facilities are characterised by. In order to achieve full success in this matter, changes related to Polish thinking about work processes and people who do it are needed.

⁶ K. Dobrowolski, *LEANowy networking w Gliwicach*, Lean jest dla ludzi, 2018, <https://leanjestdla ludzi.pl/lean-spotkanie-networking-gliwice/> (access: 10.6.2020).

⁷ V. Elmer, *Gardening at work is sprouting up all over*, Fortune, 2011, <https://fortune.com/2011/04/11/gardening-at-work-is-sprouting-up-all-over/> (access: 10.6.2020).

2.3 FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

Chill out spaces, as already mentioned, have become very popular in Polish office architecture. They are realized in various forms, sizes and devices. The Euvic office building is an example of using play areas in the workplace. The facility is located in the eastern part of the city in the district of Sośnica on the border with the city of Zabrze, which is not a very representative part of Gliwice city. The area of industrial character is located in the vicinity of railway tracks and is associated with a rather unsafe district of the city. Locating office buildings in such areas is most appropriate. This can not only increase the number of jobs but also provide an opportunity for a modern and friendly area surrounding the facility. In the case of the study of the Euvic office building, no measures were identified to improve the aesthetic value of the district. Only the interesting facade of the building has a small but positive impact on it. Considering the industrial character of the city, it is difficult to find more effective space to use ecology and green elements such as green walls. However, it was decided to use plant elements in some work areas in the interiors. They are located, among other things, at a large recreation area designed also for playful activities. The room is located on the underground floor where a modern kitchen and technical rooms are also located. The playroom is about 30 square meters. It is equipped with various types of seats, a foosball table, a skateboard and a video game zone. The environmental interview with employees shows that the space is not used too often. It is rather used for meetings and gatherings which is facilitated by a sliding projector located at the entrance to the room. Interestingly, there is a small space directly behind the game room which originally probably had technical functions related to the operation of the building. On the day of the study, the room was used for the work area. This was explained by the rapidly growing team of employees. Narrow, small and dark space is far from the ideal of a creative workplace. However, it was not decided to use the already unused chill out zone for new workstations. There are many available solutions for combining chill out zones and workspace, which showcase foreign projects.⁸ Increased knowledge of the subject could help to avoid uncomfortable working conditions. The situation described may reveal another aspect concerning the company under investigation. The conclusion is to put the prestige of having a chill out zone in an office building above the comfort of employees. What do employees think about the playroom? Why do they not use it or use it very rarely? Interviews with employees show that they are afraid to evaluate their own work. They suspect they may be blamed for poor worktime organization caused by using the chill out zone. A similar opinion prevails among employees of another office located in Gliwice called Future Processing. The company is located in several buildings adjacent to each other. The area surrounding them is used for green areas and recreation zones. The offer for additional play areas for employees is very broad in the case of Future Processing. However, according to background survey, not all are used. This is especially true of a slide located in one of the buildings. One of the employees described the slide as 'embarrassing' and 'ridiculing' his work (Ill. 2). Locating such a device in office buildings became popular after the publication and articles about the Google office building located in Silicon Valley.

⁸ For example, Uniplaces Office in Lisbon or Saatchi & Saatchi Office in New York.



III. 2. Slide located in Future Processing Office. Photo taken by author in 2017

Future Processing is certainly one of the companies that puts employees first. Perhaps it is connected with the awareness of how important is the employee's satisfaction with the broadly understood work environment in the process of building the company's success.

Therefore, the company has quite an extensive human resources department, including the cultural sector. The exact scheme of the management of the company is a secret. In the research process, however, it has been possible to get information on certain strategies concerning the play and work space. Personnel members systematically monitor the frequency of use of the chill space by office employees. One of the ways of tracking the use of these spaces are cyclical interviews with groups of employees. Employees can, of course, discuss any issues concerning the working environment during such meetings. They are also surveyed for satisfaction with the presence of the chill zones and asked if they use them. If the results of the conversations are negative, the causes of negative attitudes towards relaxation and play areas are examined. Background survey also shows that employees are encouraged to use the chill out areas and are interviewed for what purpose and how to use them. This is certainly the reason for the success of other chill out areas such as the spa area, massage rooms, gym, library and video game room. Working for Future Processing is quite desirable by the IT industry environment, and the recruitment process is divided into many stages which verify, among others, creative and productive thinking. This is certainly influenced not only by the rapidly growing company, but also by the attitude towards the employee. The environmental interview with employees shows that they particularly value the spa area and the office gym. They also often use the services of a masseur employed in the company. These spaces are usually used before or after work. It is also possible to use the described zones at any time during the working day.

3. SUMMARY

Does Polish office architecture balance on the verge of lying about modernity and innovation of the creative work environment? On the basis of the facilities presented in the article, such a conclusion may be drawn. Often employers set their companies' prestige goals by identifying them with possessions. Having modern solutions and showing openness to innovation in order to establish international cooperation and build one's own brand. Such a lie, if it is not verified by company owners, will certainly be verified by employees over time. One of such lies is to imitate foreign trends and apply them in the Polish working environment while not understanding the purpose of their use. This causes not only spatial chaos, but also disorientation in the social working environment.

3.1 TRUTH ABOUT PLAY AND WORK

Knowing the definition of play and work is essential to attempt to introduce this type of work into office architecture. It is quite closely related to the typology of activity-based working. This is primarily based on broadly defined activities during the working day. The definition of this concept involves the achievement of three components.⁹ These are the goal of achieving fun, a high degree of interaction and an enthusiastic attitude. The emphasis here is clearly on the appropriate design of the functional program for the play areas. These zones should be interactive which means generating a reaction with a user or group of users. Workplace

⁹ N.A. Celestine, G. Yeo, *Having Some Fun with It: A Theoretical Review and Typology of Activity-Based Play-at-Work*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2020, article in press.

architecture has a significant impact on the enjoyment of the working environment. Play and work zones allow employees to experience more pleasure during the work, which has a significant impact on its effects.¹⁰ A positive attitude and vigour at work are the basic factors contributing to the company's success. So, it's understandable that many foreign companies style the workplace into a fun space.

3.2 PARTICIPATION AND INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYEES – THE KEY TO THE TRUTH

The desire to apply play and work zones in Polish office architecture is understandable. It is a result of the pursuit of modernity and a symbol of opening up to new solutions. However, the decisions made with the location of the play and work space should be made consciously. The wide range of typologies of the play area that is available should be limited according to employees' preferences and the nature of the work. An interesting aspect in this context is the play and work offices, which allow employees to come to work with the dog. The previously controversial solution has been applied in the Polish office buildings of Nestle Purina.¹¹ The company has also launched the *Pets at Work Alliance* and provides detailed information on the benefits of having dogs in workspaces on its website. The page contains tips on how to adapt the office according to the idea described. Studies are also available on the offices that are pets friendly. They show that more than 1/3 of the employees are healthier and happier if there are animals in their workplace. However, literature research shows that this type of solution generates various activities prior to adapting the office for animals.¹² First of all, the consent of all employees is essential. Information on the nature of animals and possible behavioural training is also needed. This is to avoid aggressive behaviour between them and towards employees. The animals must also be vaccinated and tested for diseases. It is also important to know about potential allergies among workers that could be caused by animals. These are just a few steps before adapting the workplace for dogs. This example perfectly illustrates the need to participate with employees in adapting their workplace to the idea of play and work. In the absence of co-creation of a workplace with a team of employees, the Polish office architecture exposes itself to a lie about a modern and creative workplace. The key to the truth of the creative workplace is certainly to verify that employees use the play and work areas in a way that has a positive impact on their work and its environment. Interviews with employees about the selection of appropriate typology and equipment of play zones can be a success in developing a given company. In Polish companies that employ several hundred employees, it will not be possible without training them in the proper use of play areas. The decision on how to adapt the workplace to the idea of play and work should be made after prior analysis and outlining the objectives that a given company wants to achieve through such an approach.

¹⁰ L. Fourie, C. Els, L. de Beer, *A Play-at-Work Intervention: What are the Benefits?*, South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 2020, vol. 23, no. 1, art. 2815.

¹¹ *Zaproś psy do swojego biura razem z Nestlé PURINA*, OOH Magazine, 2018, <https://oohmagazine.pl/14858,zapros-psy-do-swojego-biura-razem-z-nestle-purina.html> (access: 10.6.2020).

¹² D. Ferguson, *Paws for thought: why allowing dogs in the office is a good idea*, The Guardian, 18.5.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2016/may/18/dogs-in-office-canine-colleagues-staff-wellbeing> (access: 10.6.2020).

References

- [1] Brown S., Vaughan C., *Play. How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and invigorates the Soul*, Avery, New York 2009.
- [2] Celestine N.A., Yeo G., *Having Some Fun with It: A Theoretical Review and Typology of Activity-Based Play-at-Work*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2020, article in press.
- [3] Fourie L., Els C., de Beer L., *A Play-at-Work Intervention: What are the Benefits?*, South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 2020, vol. 23, no. 1, art. 2815.
- [4] Dobrowolski K., *LEANowy networking w Gliwicach*, Lean jest dla ludzi, 2018, <https://leanjestdla.ludzi.pl/lean-spotkanie-networking-gliwice/> (access: 10.6.2020).
- [5] Elmer V., *Gardening at work is sprouting up all over*, Fortune, 2011, <https://fortune.com/2011/04/11/gardening-at-work-is-sprouting-up-all-over/> (access: 10.6.2020).
- [6] Evans G.W., Johnson D., *Stress and Open-Office Noise*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2000, vol. 85, no. 5, pp. 779–783.
- [7] Ferguson D., *Paws for thought: why allowing dogs in the office is a good idea*, The Guardian, 18.5.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2016/may/18/dogs-in-office-canine-colleagues-staff-wellbeing> (access: 10.6.2020).
- [8] Piklikiewicz-Kęsicka I., *Modernity of Workplace Architecture* [in:] *Defining the Architectural Space. Tradition and Modernity in Architecture*, vol. 8, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2019.
- [9] Witczak W., *Zdolność do ciężkiej pracy umysłowej*, Teka Komisji Prawniczej, 2008, vol. 1, pp. 208–216.
- [10] *Zapros psy do swojego biura razem z Nestlé PURINA*, OOH Magazine, 2018, <https://oohmagazine.pl/14858,zapros-psy-do-swojego-biura-razem-z-nestle-purina.html> (access: 10.6.2020).
- [11] Zieliński R., *Tak wygląda najlepsze biuro we Wrocławiu, laureat konkursu Office Superstar*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 7.10.2019, <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,25281841,tak-wyglada-najlepsze-biuro-we-wroclawiu-laureat-konkursu-office.html?disableRedirects=true> (access: 10.6.2020).

Author's note:

Izabela Piklikiewicz-Kęsicka, M.Sc. Arch.

Researcher and lecturer at Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture. Apart from researcher work, she is also involved in architectural design. Using the possibilities of scientific tools, she questioned the direction of the development of Polish workplace architecture.

izabela.piklikiewicz-kesicka@put.poznan.pl