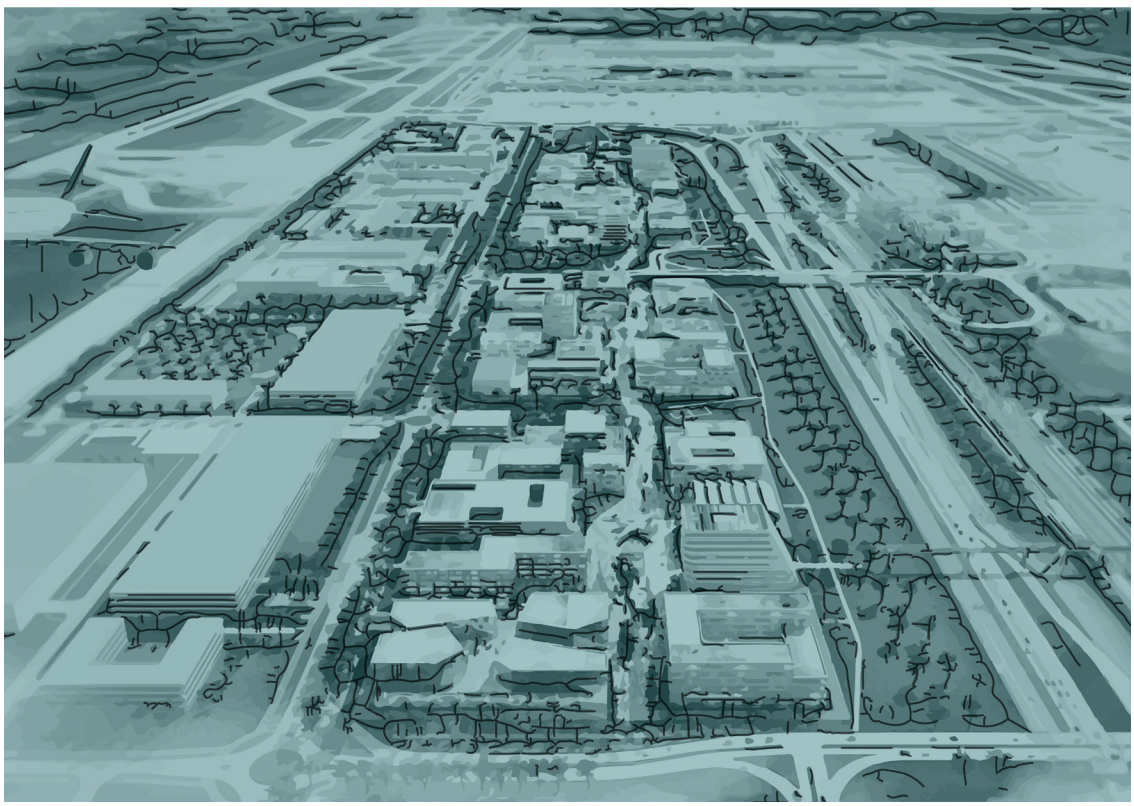
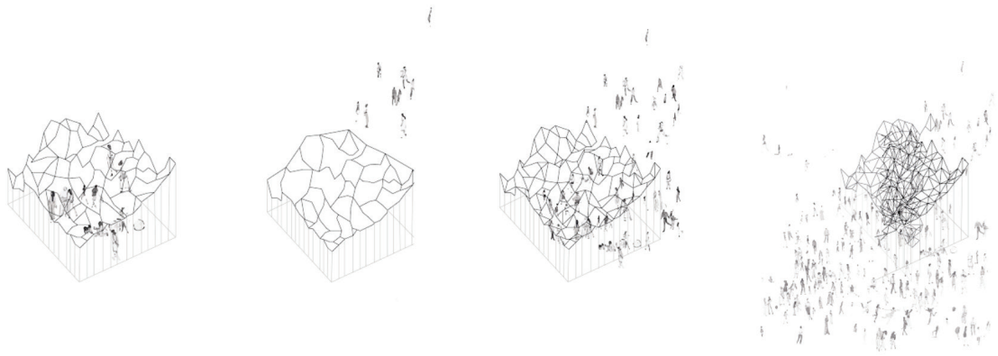
LabCampus report

MIT Senseable City Lab



Preface



Digital technologies are enhancing physical spaces allowing for a wide range of experiences in human interaction and socialization. Future workplaces such as *LabCampus*, which are focused on fostering creative industries of the 21st century, have the challenge of understanding and even forecasting future dynamics of work environments in order to provide enticing, yet functional spaces that push the boundaries of spatial design. However, the Covid-19 epidemic has generated further reflections on the future of these spaces: a black swan event which forces us to further reflect on the future of how we design and create our workspaces, taking into account conditions of public and personal safety, along with sudden yet profound shifts in human behaviour.

Following this premise, on a webinar on October 27th the MIT Senseable City Lab presented and discussed how the nature of work has shifted alongside with how people's communication patterns have become increasingly reliant on digital tools. We showcased the methods and projects created by the MIT Senseable City Lab to have a shared reflection on the past, current and future needs of workspaces as we go about our daily lives. On October 28th, we engaged in two participatory design workshops, with LabCampus' partners and employees, focused on working life before and after Covid19.

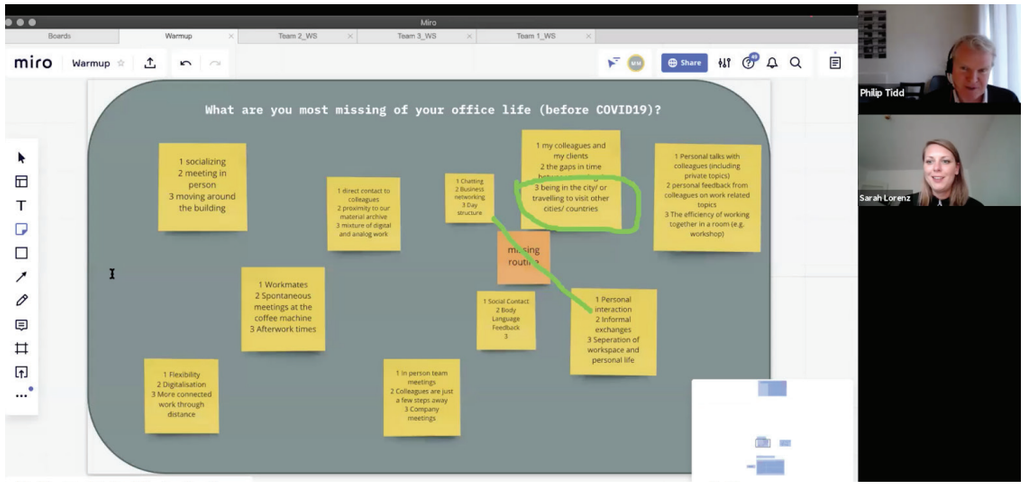
The workshop was organized around the deconstruction and discussion leading global cases of creative spaces, to understand what makes them work. Using a participatory design exercise, we imagined and built possible scenarios and spatial configurations for the future of LabCampus.

The following report showcases the ideas and principles that were discussed during the workshop sessions and the related research conducted by the *MIT Senseable City Lab*.

Right: Belgrado, Serbia STUDIO AUTORI 2017

Leveraging the power of space through digital

Workshop - first activity



What stimuli are necessary (formal or facilities/services) and what is the user's point of view?

How can the physical environment through technology influence people's communication patterns to achieve connectivity, engagement, new encounters, serendipitous exchange, transversal and multidisciplinary collaborations?

In this section, we highlight some issues that emerged during the participatory workshop with LabCampus employees and partners.

Workshop overview. The workshop session was organized on October 28, 2020 with the total presence of n. 17 participants.

The mode was totally digital through Zoom (zoom.us). To support some participatory activities the Miro platform was used, an online collaborative whiteboard platform enabling collocated, distributed, and remote teams to communicate and collaborate (miro.com).

The participants involved in the activities were partly subjects of partner companies that potentially will inhabit the future *LabCampus* space and were divided into a group that opened the session on October 28, 2020.

A second group, deliberately separated, included the subjects and employees of the LabCampus project.

Partners Group. Cynthia Bleck (Siemens), Barbara Wiethoff (JOI-Design, Accor), Pawel Krolikowski (CBRE), Sarah Lorenz (German Entrepreneurship Center), Alexander Hömer (Flughafen München), Luis Habermayer (Innosabi), Philip Tidd (Gensler), Maike Wursthorn (Werk1), Isabella Erdmann (Siemens Real Estate), Moritz Müller (LabCampus).

LabCampus Core Group. Sarah Wittlieb (VP Sales & Innovation), Alexander Garber (Sales), Andrea Hofmann (Community), Moritz Müller (Innovation), Marc Wagener (Managing Director), Yara Bures (Marketing), Lisa Roth (Operations), Harald Schäfer (Director Operations).

The idea of keeping the groups separate was deliberately structured to be able to compare different perspectives on future Campus spaces. The common structure of both workshops provided:

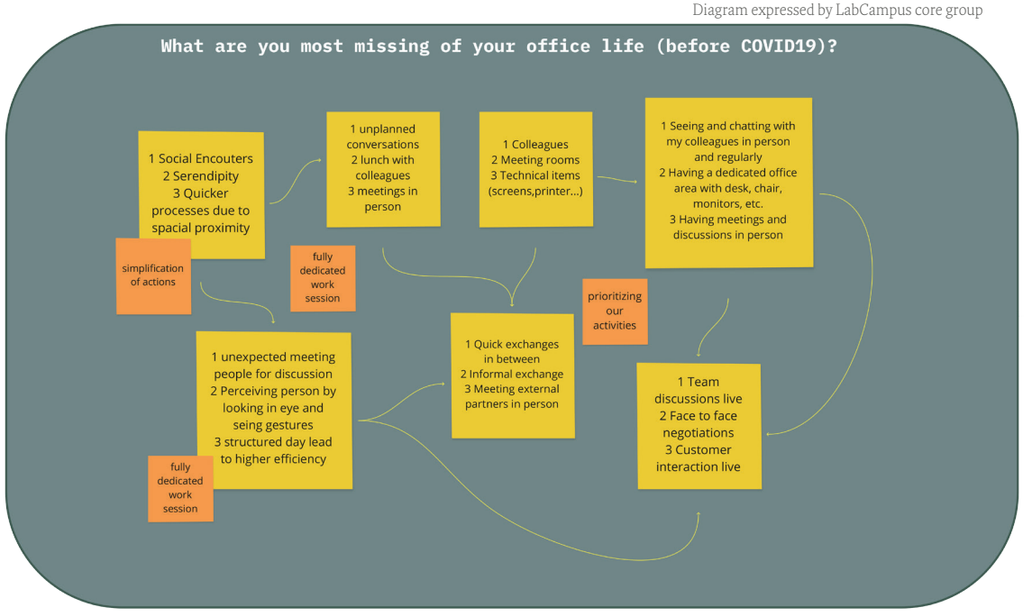
*** Warm-up session.** Two questions as the opening of a discussion on the changing work dynamics and perception of change before and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

*** Lecture and physical deconstruction activity.** *A presentation on some components of the space that generate different human actions and behaviours on different scales. Relations between public and private spaces, flows and hierarchies of functions. Presentation of a case study (Station F) and participatory activity as a reflection on the elements previously presented.*

From the first question asked to the two groups these concepts emerged from the discussion:

Diagram expressed by Partners' group

Diagram expressed by LabCampus core group



From the second question asked to the two groups these concepts emerged from the discussion:

Diagram expressed by Partners' group

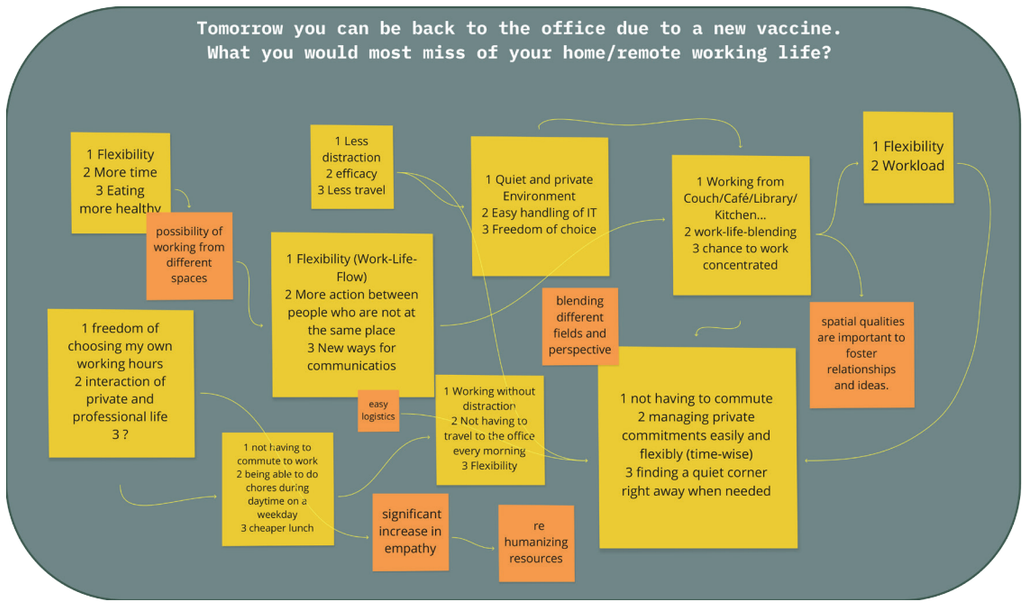
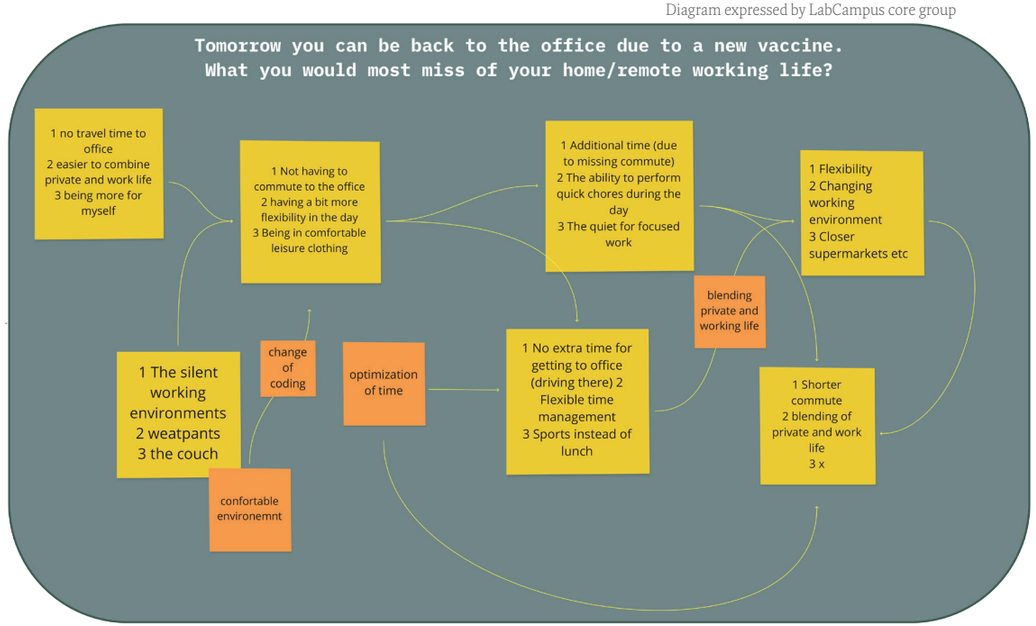
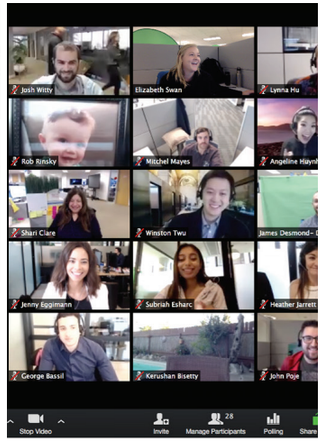


Diagram expressed by LabCampus core group



Workshop - Second activity



Deconstruction activity. In order to deepen some topics from a spatial point of view on working environments, some theoretical ideas have been presented accompanied by an interesting example and case study of some concepts: Station F, Paris.

We started from the evolution of working environments (visible through the images proposed in this page).

Change is a vital part of architecture and design. Occupant needs change and morph, designers constantly reevaluate and redesign the built environment to meet those needs. This is especially evident in the workplace. Over the years, the workplace has undergone a dramatic transformation from a windowless room of cubicles where workers could have spaces all their own, bringing an aspect of personalization to the workplace to inviting spaces that inspire and rejuvenate. Now the keyword is flexibility. The same space can be used for a presentation, a solo work session, or a private meeting.

Campuses are not just sites of office buildings. They must be a complex system of permeable places of exchange, without a symbolic fence, having to exchange itself with the context and territory around it. In this sense, the planning, the creation, the enabling, and use of public spaces requires a clear concept of user and use. The process is, therefore, necessary for specifically playing its role in this created relational chain.

The relational chain from interaction to innovation is fundamental in this sense. Moreover, following Gibson (1979) citation the built environment can influence human behaviour by encouraging and restricting behaviour through the affordances they offer.

Places like campuses, whether they host offices or Innovation districts,

Top left: A vintage photograph of a mid-20th century open office and From WSJ: A typical *cubicle farm* office layout

Below: We Work, New York office

Top right: A new contemporary environment

Next page: images taken during the activity on Miro.

After having raised the topics presented previously, the following themes have been placed at the basis of a participatory activity related to a series of images of spaces within companies or offices.

The activity called *Pin activity* was organized on the Miro platform through a voting session that involved answering the following questions by selecting some details and/or spaces displayed on the board.

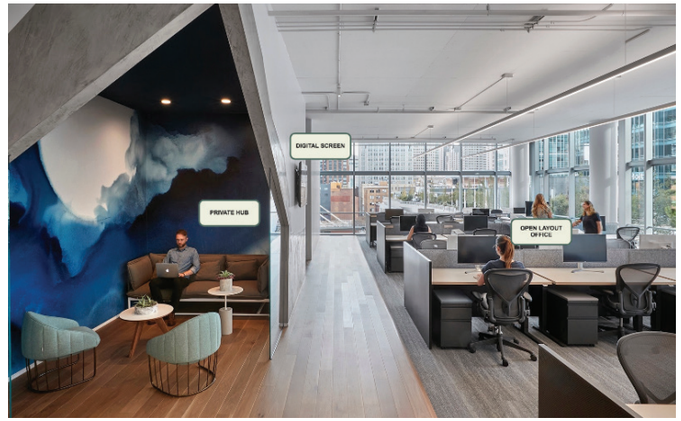
Where you would..

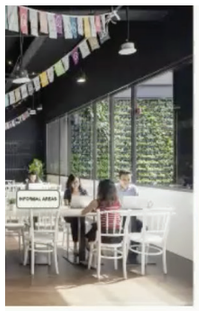
..discuss ideas with colleagues?

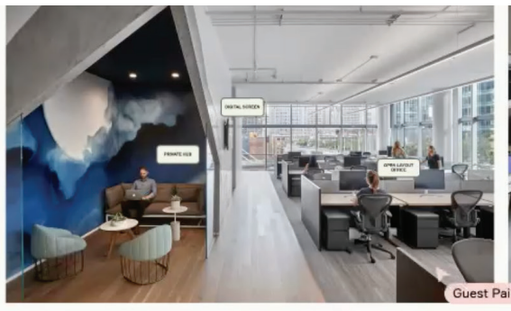
..work?

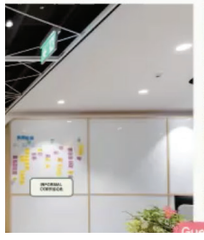
..present your work?

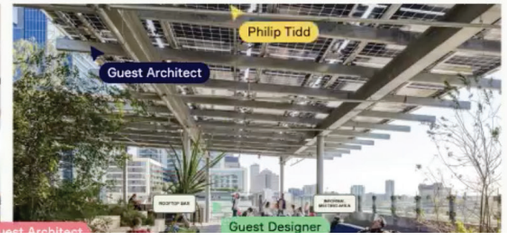
Here on the right two examples of the six images proposed in the activity and their highlighted parts to be chosen to answer the question. their highlighted parts. At the bottom we can see how the participants are interacting.

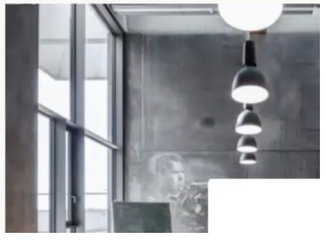












Conclusion

We began our workshop exercise by posing an initial question to the group: what we're going to miss and what we won't miss about the way we're currently working during the Covid-19 crisis?

The goal behind this question was twofold, first, to recognize how fast our working environments can change due to external forces, and the way in which digital technologies can be used in the proces.

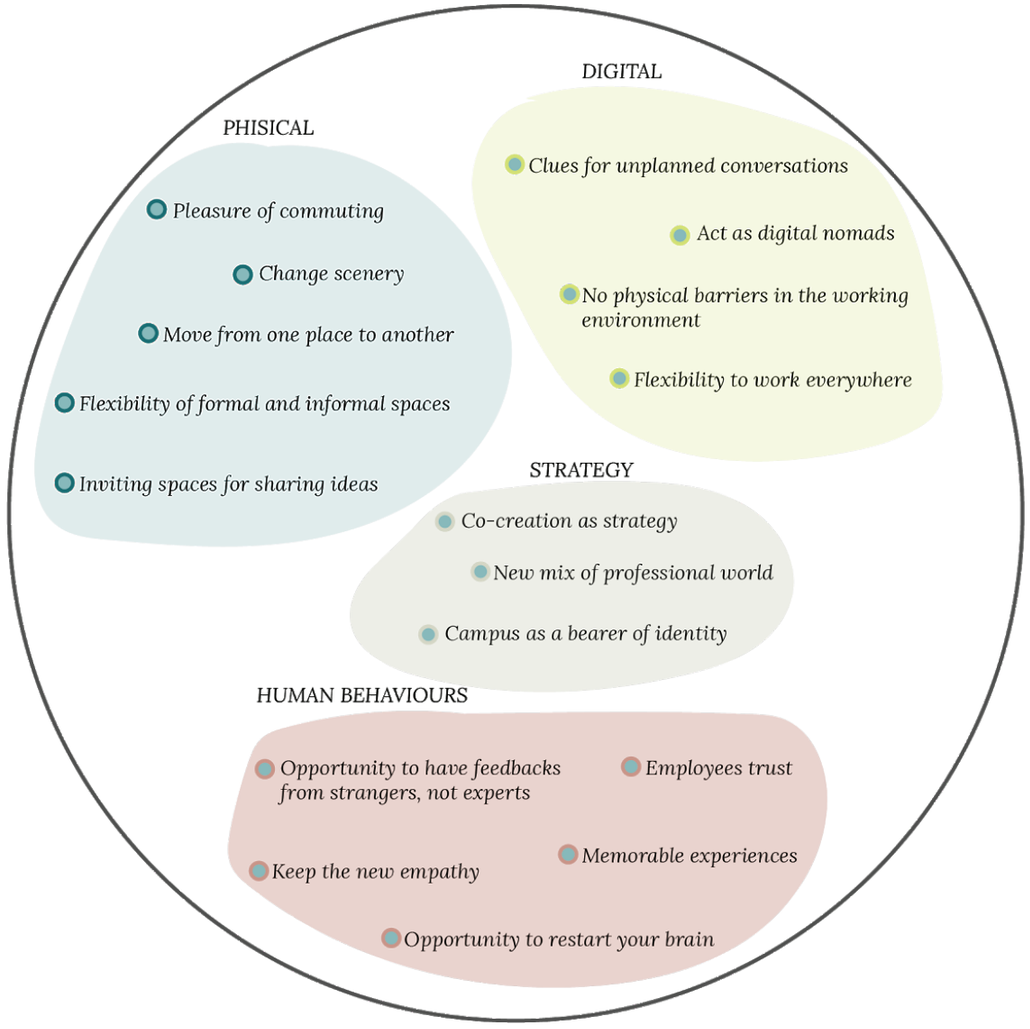
Second, to reflect on how there were some positive experiences that are part of our current workspaces (in-home) and that some of these experiences might be transferable to the future workspaces.

Labels such as authenticity, aesthetics, historical look and feel are important to be injected into any discussion regarding the future of workspaces, but there's more than that. We need to focus on developing spatial syntheses that emotionally resonate with people, injecting values on which people could have more agency and fun with them. Transforming the dynamics of work in the process by changing the spatial dynamics that drive social discussions.

One example of this concept is the Pixar headquarters building in San Francisco. The way they have interlocked playful spaces with their creative spaces and made them into social spaces, it's all interconnected. The interconnectedness between the private, semi-private and public spaces are all playful, identity heavy environments that build from the expertise of teams such as Disney's imagineers. These spaces are simultaneously workspaces, meeting spaces and a form of mise-en-scene. When we think about looking into what's going to be created at LabCampus the challenge is to think about in terms not only a function. But in terms of play, in terms of discovery and in terms of it messing up with the pre-encoded value of the form that is going to be created.

The discussions during the workshop focused on extracting from the participants the kinds of values useful for developing such environments, useful to interconnect people, ideas and experiences. Some final insights and representation of the discussion results are shown in the diagram on the right (following page).

While we compiled the workshop responses in the diagram, it is important to note that there were some differences between the two groups and it is fundamental for the goals of LabCampus to harmonize the discussed values in order to allow for the horizons of the project to meet all the different ideas and opinions expressed. Moreso, the different perspectives on the use of the workspace expressed, become more interesting when we take into account the learning that stems from our unusual Covid-19 period, some of which can be turned into an opportunity, considering that the new work normal will differ from pre-covid times. For the goal of LabCampus there is the challenge to imagine an environment for the future of work. The discussion that we had, thinking through different typologies of space, is on top of an underlying moment which clearly tells us that the future normal it's going to be a mix between our current normal and the past one, filtered through the lens of new human experiences mediated by digital technologies.

We need to reflect in terms of aesthetics, meaning and place. We need to create a space with emotional significance and resonance to us. Values such as aesthetics which are often seen as superfluous are actually what makes architecture alive long throughout time because they create spaces where people want to be within. And if people like space they will continue to invent and reinvent new activities to do in those spaces, because it creates wellbeing. The lessons are clear, people like emotionally resonant spaces, and will reconfigure them as needed to keep pace with the functional needs of the moment. There are hundreds of buildings from the modern era that have gone through this process. So if we think about what are the values we need to move beyond the discussion of creating a great place to work and shift into a discussion of simply creating a great place and now. That has to do with aesthetics, but it also has to do with processes of discovery and processes of play and fostered through experience design.

Therefore, we need to focus on developing spaces and processes that let people wander in wonder. The French Situationist movement of the mid 20th century, explained how the feel of the place is as relevant as its functional value. During the workshop we discussed the flaneurs, who would just wander around Paris in a never ending process of discovering and getting the feel of the city. Seeking nice places where they could get lost and discover the social dynamics of places that invite groups of people to not only work and socialize but ultimately to also play in them. And to this sense, digital technologies today are a great vehicle to do that because they allow us to encode multiple functions in the same place, which means that we don't need to think about space as a static major, but rather, we can think about spaces as dynamic and playful; allowing for greater flexibility in finding ways to make them memorable.