

Creative environments for design education and practice: A typology of creative spaces



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This article presents a typology of creative spaces that is relevant to facilitating creative working and learning processes for designers. Drawing on qualitative user research with cultural probes in a design thinking institution, this typology identifies five different types of creative spaces along with five related spatial qualities. The paper suggests characteristics and criteria for each type and quality and summarizes the results in a framework. A second study in a practitioner's context validated these findings. The work presented in this article contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the built environment for creative design in education and practice and might inspire designers and educators to improve the design of their work environments.

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Keywords: architectural design, interior design, systems design, design thinking, creative space

Designing and learning are two sides of the same coin. Design practitioners constantly have to adapt to new situations and contexts. No design project is the same, and research is part of almost any design project. At the same time, today's design education is mainly centred on project work, sometimes involving real clients. Consequently, design educational environments are considered to have similar requirements as spaces in design practice. Analysing creative spaces in both design education and design practice might reveal interesting insights for both worlds. The goal of this study is to provide an overview of relevant space types for creative work along with related spatial qualities that forms a typology of creative spaces relevant for design education, design thinking, and design practice.

This article is structured as follows: In the first section, we review the relevant literature. Section 2 presents our research method. Section 3 describes an empirical study in an educational institution for design thinking. The findings from this study have led to the development of the typology of creative spaces. Exemplary spaces from the study are shown to illustrate possible applications of different space types and qualities. In Section 4, we present an additional study in a practitioner's context to validate the typology. We conclude by discussing our findings and providing suggestions for future work.

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www.elsevier.com/locate/destud
0142-694X *Design Studies* 56 (2018) 54–83
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2018.02.001>
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1 Literature review

Recently, public interest in creative environments has increased, which can be reasoned from the large number of ‘coffee table books’ on the topic of creative office spaces (e.g. Borges, Ehmann, & Klanten, 2013; Georgi & McNamara, 2016; Groves, Knight, & Denison, 2010; Stewart, 2004) and books about creative learning spaces (e.g. Dudek, 2012; Ehmann, Borges, & Klanten, 2012; Mirchandani, 2015). However, these publications merely present a collection of photographic case examples of peculiar office or learning spaces. They are rarely categorized systematically; neither do they provide any theoretical underpinning about possible reasons why the spaces are designed as they are. Nevertheless, these examples demonstrate an increased public and corporate interest in the topic of creative working and learning environments that warrants further investigation. What follows is a structured literature review on the phenomenon of creative work environments in design thinking, design practice, and design educational contexts to provide an overview of relevant literature in this field.

1.1 Procedure

We conducted a keyword search within the Scopus database with a focus on ‘creative *learning* spaces’, and a second search with a focus on ‘creative *work* or *office* spaces’. For both search steps, possible combinations with synonyms were also considered (e.g. space vs. environment, creative vs. innovative, office vs. work). The results were limited to peer-reviewed journal and conference publications only.¹

We analysed the returned 242 sources based on their abstract. We identified papers for exclusion that were either unrelated to the topic or limited to specific aspects of the creative environment (e.g. lighting, climate, ergonomics of office chairs) as well as papers that addressed a peculiar (non-design-related) context, such as hospitals, libraries, or nursing homes. We conducted a full-text analysis on the remaining 43 sources, which left us with 30 sources. After a backward and forward citation analysis, we identified 14 more sources as potentially relevant for the topic. In this step we also included non-peer-reviewed sources such as books and PhD theses that appeared to be of relevance. This procedure resulted in a total number of 44 sources that were included for further analysis. From these 44 sources 15 presented classification systems, such as the one we suggest in this paper. The remaining 29 sources represented either literature reviews about the phenomenon, case studies or empirical studies, experimental approaches, theories about the influence of space on creativity, or guidelines for designing creative spaces. Several sources presented combinations of various approaches. We limit our discussion below to the 15 classifications because this is also the concern of our work. The remaining 29 sources will be discussed in future work. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the systematic literature search approach.

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