

Will 'Good' Architecture Make Us More Creative? Examining the Role of Place in Creative Cognition

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1. ABSTRACT

What role does architecture play in creativity? Jonas Salk sought to create majestic landscapes and contemplative architecture at the Salk Institute to inspire the type of creative insight he experienced at the St. Francis of Assisi monastery in Italy. Florence, Athens, Paris, and Vienna are places known for periods of spectacularly high creativity — and cities today incorporate urban and architectural designs intended to emulate their success. Famously creative people, like Proust, Kipling, and Kant, describe how rooms, tools, and inspirational objects are instrumental for their creativity. In an attempt to capture in time the essence of creative workplaces such as these, the art studios and offices of the eminently creative are often carefully preserved at time of death and converted to public museums. There is, however, a lack of empirical investigation into the relationship between architecture and people's creative processes. Creativity researchers who examine the environmental impacts on creativity focus almost exclusively on social environments. My research draws from empirical knowledge in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and cognitive science to addresses the conflicting beliefs between creativity researchers who feel the physical environment is unimportant for creativity and architects who create settings with the specific intention of inspiring creativity.

As architects spend considerable time and money designing places to foster creativity, they do so with no common empirically derived theory to guide their practice. In this presentation I present a new theoretical model of creativity that begins to bridge the gap between creativity research and architectural design. First I will illustrate how creativity may to be comprised of five physically-situated and interrelated modes of creative cognition. Next, I will use the theoretical model to evaluate common architectural design strategies used to promote creativity in order to demonstrate how it may be used as a preliminary framework to hypothesize why some architectural design strategies are more successful at fostering creativity than others. Finally, I present some implications for practice and recommendations for future research needed to refine and extend the model into a more fully developed theory about the relationship between human creative cognition and architectural design.

2. AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Malinin is a registered architect, cognitive scientist, and Assistant Professor of Interior Design at Colorado State University. Her research interests generally encompass the relationship between cognition and the designed environment, including how workplace and educational settings may support creativity, health/wellbeing, and environmental stewardship.

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