New York - Livable Cities

AMPS Proceedings Series 34.3

AMPS PROCEEDINGS SERIES 34.3

Livable Cities: A Conference on Issues Affecting Life in Cities

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INTRODUCTION

Livable Cities: A Conference on Issues Affecting Life in Cities

What makes a city livable? Transport, housing, health. Open space, mobility and the environment. Matters of culture, entrepreneurship, crime and safety. Affordability and access to education. Depending on whose 'livability index' you look at, it may include design quality, sustainability and the digital infrastructures of the smart city. Other criteria applied may encompass food access, job opportunities or walkability. Inclusivity and the politics of participation also come into play. Discrimination in all its forms impacts livability and social and political equity.

The past two decades have seen an exponential rise of livability measures. Reflecting increased urbanity globally, they risk making the notion of the city ever more contested. The two cities that host this event are cases in point. The Mercer Livability Ranking takes New York as the datum by which all other cities globally are graded – as better or worse. London, by contrast, measures itself: the London Assembly scoring everything from air quality to indices of deprivation. When we consider the livability of cities then, it is clear we are dealing with a plethora of issues – both isolated and, inevitably, interconnected.

Responding to this scenario, the papers in this publication tackle these issues above from various angles. They examine how we live in cities, and how every issue we encounter morphs with considerations of others, whether housing, architecture, urban planning, health, IT, crime and safety, city management, economics or the environment.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE HYBRID WORKSPACES IN THE "NEW NORMAL"

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INTRODUCTION

The hearth of this congress is: What makes a city livable?

Our answer to this question is: The new quality of the workplace.

Cities have historically established their identity in the workplace, transforming over time as labor relations change.

The pandemic emergency, forcing millions of people to work from home, has made Agile Working an immediate necessity with a drastic and deep change in the way of working. On the other hand, the long-forced isolation has repositioned the individual at the center of life with his desire to return to presence and normality, directing the main question on well-being, safety and quality of workspaces.

These aspects of the "new normal" lead to hybrid ways of working, which become not only one of the most interesting frontiers of workplaces, but also devices capable of determining the future layout of cities and their livability.

The social and spatial effects of hybrid work invite architectural culture to investigate its functional and formal implications, to develop ideas and tools useful in designing spaces of working.

Therefore, foremost, the research is focused on the changes between the epochal passages that have marked the transformations of workspaces and of the city itself. Secondly, it offers a possible interpretation of the experimentations and knowledge that we have on the different meanings of the hybrid workplace. Lastly, it opens the discussion on the future urban role of hybrid workplaces. An aspect that appears relevant not only for the organization of work, but also for the reorganization of cities, with potentially positive implications for the entire ecosystem.

Figure 1. Workstation in the city of Lahti

The mutations of the workspace"

Leap Point n°1

The transition from the craft world to the industrial world has caused a break in the previous social balances and has also marked the first major change in the workspace.

In pre-industrial era, work was an individual and artisanal activity, often domestic, which took place in times and in ways that were not strictly binding.

The invention of the machine has given rise to a radical change in the dynamics of production, whose cultural and social effects have been reflected on the city and its spaces.

The industrial system changes the methods of production, the forms of work organization, the social order, and the way of conceiving the spaces of production.

Urban living itself, for a long time, has been organized on the rhythms of industry, which determined the necessary regulation of social living and standard working patterns.

Rhythms of work and rest conformed, which affecting the construction of the city.

The means of production, which simultaneously involved the mass of workers at different moments of their existence, also affecting the construction of the city.

Masses of workers have been uprooted by the demands of production and their existence was marked by the negative effects of factory work.

According to industry times the concrete shape of modern society has been planned, designed and realized. The land was organized focusing on the division into social classes and the distinction of uses and activities.

Modernity marked the transition from the Gothic-mercantile city to the Great City, also bringing with it new conceptions of urban and workspaces that suggested a break with the foreshadows of the traditional city. Experiences from which the potential of the new industrial dimension emerges, valued as the identity space of modern society.

Tony Garnier, with his Cité industrielle, addresses the theme of the formal characteristics of the industrial city, enhancing its semantic characteristics.

Peter Behrens, with his AEG, represents the industrial universe as a bearer of positive values, the premise of a "new classicism".[1] The factory becomes a monument to the new business and to new working relationships.

Leap Point n°2

The second major change occurred in the late phase of the Industrial Revolution, with the affirmation of the "scientific organization of work", theorized by Taylor.

A new model of production organization based on the analysis of the tasks, with the separation between intellectual and manual activities, which finds the main icon of modernity in the Fordist factory.

Henry Ford understood and applied the potential of the Tayloristic model, generally associated with the assembly line.

He entrusted the design of his factories to Albert Khan, who developed simple and flexible systems to allow changes in the organization of work.[2]

The workspace conforms to the new model, concretely responding to the specific needs of series production.

According to Bauman, the factory walls linked the working class and capital in mutually beneficial relationships.

The Fordist factory became the universal reference model of his time, setting the standard for all other entrepreneurs.

 the Italian industrial history[3], in those years, two distinct models of industry management emerged:

- the one by Agnelli, in perfect Fordist style, which finds in the Lingotto the materialization in architectural forms of consolidated working relationships, with an ascending articulation of production and the detached office building, which establishes the difference between manual work and intellectual work;

- the other one by Adriano Olivetti, who has gone beyond the Fordist model, combining modernization and humanism, condensed into the idea of "concrete community". A business model that aimed to create a union between ethics and production. The Olivetti industrial plants, scattered around the world, have been designed to improve working conditions and quality of life of workers, integrating the production space with new social and cultural uses, spaces and activities.

With Olivetti, the workspace is enriched with further qualities: common spaces, social functions, relationship with the landscape and environmental qualities.

While the separation of working activities sanctioned by Agnelli, between manuals and intellectuals, testifies to the emergence of a new form of work.

Leap Point n°3

Under the pressure of automation the dimension of intellectual work is increasingly asserting itself. Work gradually moves from factories to offices, with the emergence of the new social group of white-collar workers.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the number of employees involved in intellectual activities changed significantly compared to that of the working class.

On the theme of the birth of the new social group of white collar workers, since the middle of the '900 two different lines of thought arise : on one side the employees are considered part of the Fordist gear, with the same criticalities (C.W. Mills); on the other hand, a new dimension of work is envisaged that, going beyond Fordism, detaches itself from the traditional production process and acquires its own autonomy (F. Croner).

The "intellectual work" acquires a strategic importance becoming a structural aspect of the industrial society and its "concrete form": the city.

One of the symbolic cities of division of labor was Chicago, in which the specialized tertiary center was consolidated.

Leap Point n°4

All of this, before the second industrial revolution appeared no longer with the overwhelming images of the previous but, as Italo Calvino wrote, *"(...) like the bits of an information flow that runs on the circuits in the form of electronic impulses"*.[4]

Light images, vividly intelligent, able to overcome the heaviness and opacity of the world and to escape the slow petrification that no longer seemed to spare any aspect of life.

The new dimension of globalization has imposed a more fluid and dynamic relationship between working time and a time of life.

The spread of technological innovations has led to the deconstruction of work itself and the spaces in which it was carried out.

The recently emerged transformation of working methods had been underway for some time. Teleworking, already in the 1970s, anticipated an epochal turning-point in labor relations, that would overturn the consolidated paradigms and pulverize workspaces.

In this perspective, telecentres have been conceived as structures equipped with IT-tools and open communication technologies, usable by both companies and self-employed workers.

The dissolution of physical places in favor of information superhighways and their virtual environments had only partially occurred.

At least until the pandemic imposed the need for hybrid workspaces, accelerating the transition from "closed" work models towards the pulverization of active workers, and prefiguring new forms of working relationships and their spaces.

Figure 2. Piero della Francesca. Duca di Urbino,1465-1472;
George Grosz. Iniziativa imprenditoriale,1920; Gianni Agnelli

New Landscapes

It should be noted, however, that the age-old history of the transformation of workspaces finds a singular recurrence in the consideration of the balance of power in the representation of the protagonists: from the dominion over the rural landscape of the Duke of Urbino, represented by Piero della Francesca; to the crushing weight of the entrepreneur on the workers, denounced by George Grosz; up to Gianni Agnelli's self-celebration on the roof of the Lingotto.

Conceptions and temptations from which not even the self-representation of the new "liquid" capitalism seems to escape. While replacing concrete landscapes with digital landscapes, it appears to be firmly anchored in vertical models of work organization and control.

Both in the definition of relations with the workers and in the construction of concrete spaces.

Conversely, as we will see, the opportunities offered by the digital revolution seem to promise new work arrangements, which require new qualities of spaces shaped by the needs of workers and not just those of production.

Figure 3. New Landscapes

The characters of the hybrid space

Faced with what increasingly appears to be an epochal change in working relationships and the spaces dedicated to them, the question is: what are the qualities that will characterize these new spaces? And, as far as architecture is concerned: what are the design references in the context of a necessarily physical reality that is being more and more mediated by the digital dimension?

The new ways of working and the real needs of workers become the trigger of a new space in which different dimensions are called to coexist and hybridize: physical and digital, private and collective, operational and rest and leisure.

The workspace, therefore, is defined as hybrid because in addition to welcoming the work activity, it also reacts to other dimensions of human reality, becoming increasingly complex. In fact, surveys carried out on the needs of workers show that they want to work where they feel more productive, at ease and safe; expecting to spend most of the time in the office, but with the freedom to choose whether to work from home or from anywhere else, based on the activity at hand.

In this regard, it seems interesting to investigate the different ways in which the phenomenon is spatialized, in order to be able to recognize the new qualities required of workspaces and develop adequate design proposals. In this sense, we seize the opportunity to rethink the workspace by including unusual aspects in the performance of workers' daily activities, by bringing into play the different relationships between elements and pairs traditionally in antithesis, such as: Physical and digital, nature, artifice, shared intimacy, freedom, security, private public, proximity decentralization.

Physical-Digital

We are no longer within the modern condition in which spaces were shaped by the times of industry. We are inside another dimension: today we live in a *PHYGITAL* condition from which there is no going back. The new technologies promise an all-encompassing digital experience, which however takes place in two radically opposite dimensions:

- on one hand, the digital dimension, characterized by the liberation from space-time constraints, with virtual spaces which, however, return to assume a reassuring image reproducing the characteristics of the traditional office, of traditional workplaces;

- on the other hand, the physical dimension that requires empty (neutral) spaces, not having the freedom to move.
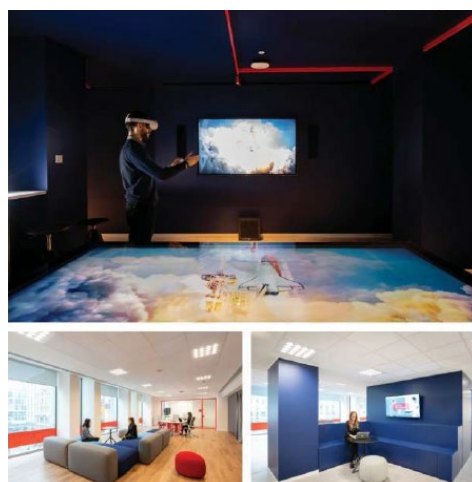

Figure 4. Physical-Digital

The virtual dimension does not require physical space quality; while the virtual space, which instead would not need physical qualities, is characterized by desks, chairs and windows with backgrounds of natural landscapes….

There is a discrepancy between the workspace proposed in the virtual dimension, traditional thus reassuring, and the physical dimension, actually, alienating. Someone tries to represent the new qualities of these spaces with answers that hold these two totally antithetical dimensions together.

In an increasingly *phygital* reality, time and space can become a resource. The body is necessarily positioned in one point, because as we know it is not alienable. Digital, on the other hand, is an extension of the human experience and allows the densification of work activity, in such way that the space can be occupied by various aspects and qualities linked to other needs of the worker.

Artifice – Nature

One of the main needs of workers is linked to well-being and comfort. The desire to reconnect with the natural world is revealed by numerous scientific researches which have shown that direct contact with nature brings numerous benefits: emotional, cognitive, an increase in creativity and productivity, it is also underlined by ordinary ways in which people express this innate need. These photographs represent the usual spaces of the common imagination, to which artistic thought is called to give meaning, in order to transform a shared and immediate need on the characteristics of the space into quality.

Figure 5. Artifice – Nature

Reconsidering the relationship between artifice and nature, the construction of the workspace must be able to welcome and introject nature and the environment in their various forms.

Aspects that Bolten[5] | Barbiero have declined into 10 themes, fixing them in a protocol of Biophilic Design. These elements can be divided into two fundamental groups which regain a link with the atavistic needs of the human being: safe habitats (Refuge) and habitats rich in resources (Procurement).

Intimate – Shared

The need for refuge reflects the necessity to have spaces for specialized activities, characterized by different degrees of intimacy, welcoming micro-environments that lead back to the domestic condition.

On the other hand, the need for supplies generates collective and free spatiality; open spaces without specific functions.

This double value of the space aims to overcome the hyper-specialization of activity-based working[6] which instead persists in response to any specific request of the client.

Figure 6. Intimate – Shared

The imposition of these different conditions in work activities brings to the fore some experiments that have already investigated new configurations of the workspace.

The architectural project is called to assume this dichotomy as a condition of the workspace and to respond to the needs of sharing, intimacy, freedom and security.

Security – Freedom

Digitization tends towards democratization and horizontal organization of activities in which people can choose their workplace. In addition to the need to recover a primordial bond with nature, p*hygital* therefore responds to another need: the one of freedom.

The binomial freedom and security recalls Bauman's thesis in his book *Liquid life.*[7]

The desire for great freedom of movement in space faces the need of safety in the environment.

In this regard, two interpretations can be distinguished.
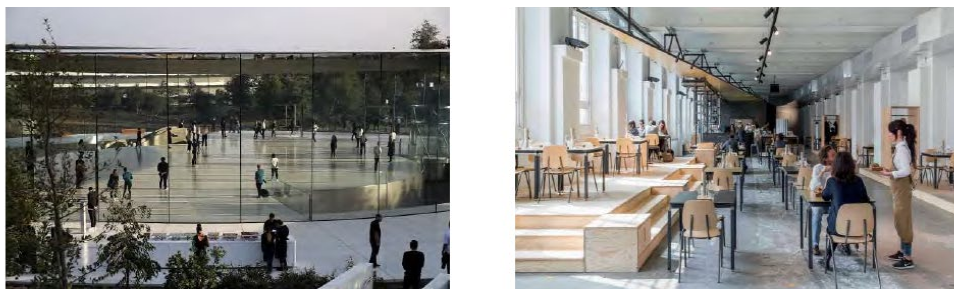
Figure 7. Security – Freedom

The first one aspires to have the greatest possible freedom within a given place, which however involves total control of security; these "bubbles" constitute, in fact, an illusory freedom of the worker. The second one interprets the relationship between control and freedom with an advantage for a greater possibility of choice, which however is paid by less control on security. In this case, the workplaces within the city look like real sponges.

Private – Public

These two terms inevitably prefigure radically opposite workspaces.

Or totally closed, private, inaccessible to the public but efficient in terms of the quality of services and comfort guaranteed to employees.

Or, instead, totally open, public, therefore places for sharing and meeting, which become an accessible point of reference for the neighborhood and the city. Fluid spaces as an extension of the urban public space for a hyper-connected community.[8]

Figure 8. Private – Public

Between these two extremes there are a series of experiences that try to make the two different conditions of space coexist. In fact, many companies, attribute the role of filter space to the ground floor, in which the public and the private interact, proposing themselves as new urban centers.

Decentralization – Proximity

Decentralization or proximity are usually considered antithetical concepts.

The new workspaces seem to make possible the coexistence of these two localization dynamics. the workspace "in its localization" at the same time dislocates itself 4 following two different modalities.

Proximity is traditionally represented by Headquarters or the city center. These workspaces continue to exist, but their function changes, serving more as a showcase for the brand. Alongside these spaces are delocalized sites, which can be indifferently found in urban or rural areas.[9] Hubs made up of flexible and hyper-connected spaces where workers can easily go for their individual activities, for moments of meeting and socializing.
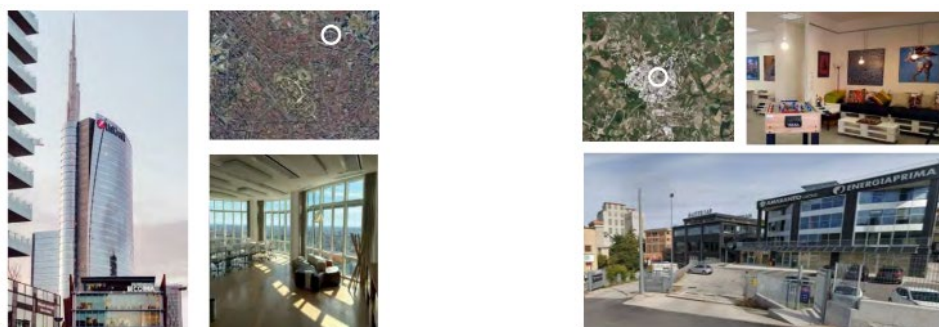
Figure 9. Decentralization – Proximity

In this perspective, the *Poste Italiane* project "Polis - Spaces for Italy" appears interesting. The project involves the creation of free and freely accessible coworking spaces, within the postal offices distributed throughout the national territory.

There are no more traditional location hierarchies. New workspaces can be located anywhere. The new ways of working make equivalent two dimensions that were previously hierarchically defined and opposite.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, we can state that all the dichotomies investigated, traditionally antithetical, are invited to coexist in the new hybrid workspaces.

By crossing the different characters, we are able to prefigure new conformations and geographies of spaces that are no longer just workspaces, but also spaces for the worker.

Spaces of life that present themselves as new urban centers characterized by the coexistence of physical and digital; by the reconnection between the artificial and the natural dimension; by the creation of intimate and shared spaces; by the desire of freedom and the need of control; by the integration between the public and private dimension and without hierarchy in locational dynamic.

For what has been said, the Hybrid Working Hub emerges not only as a new functional typology of the city, but also as a specific place of the information society; public and social space increasingly recognized and representative of the contemporary city.

In this sense, the Hybrid Working Hubs are proposed as essential devices in the definition of the future organization of the cities. New centralities capable of providing peripheral and rural areas with innovative services and regenerating abandoned urban areas. But also, cornerstones of a broader vision, such as that of the reorganization of the 15-minute city, with a view to greater livability and sustainability of urban systems.
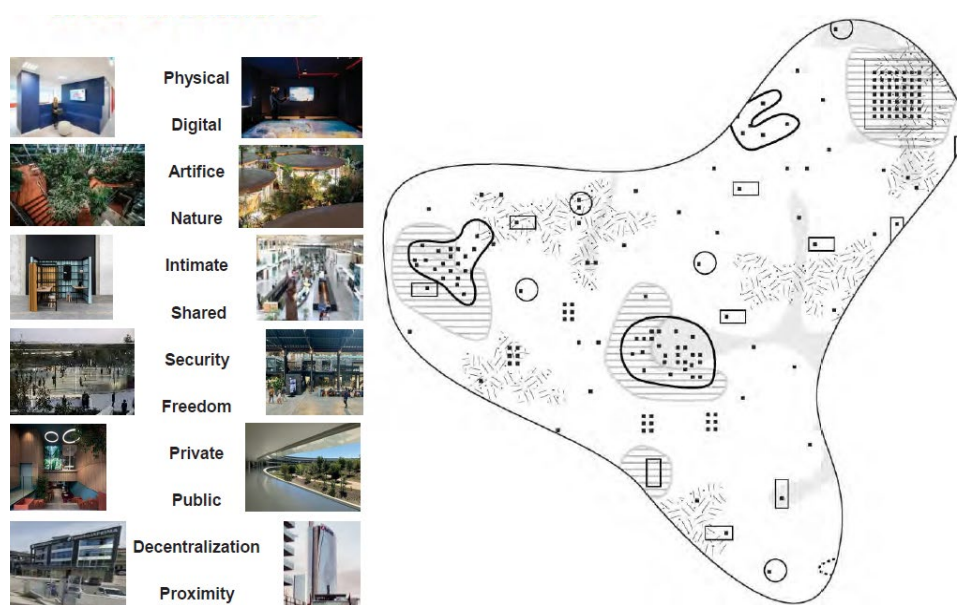

Figure 10. Hybrid Working Hub

NOTES

[1] Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura Contemporanea*. Milano: Electa, 1979.

[2] Federico Bucci, *Il metodo Kahn* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).

[3] Italo Calvino, *Lezioni Americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milano: Garzanti, 1996).

[4] "Casabella" magazine, n. 651-652, *Le fabbriche del novecento*, (December 1997- January 1998)

[5] Bettina Bolten, "Biophilic workspace design, Progettare uffici secondo la (nostra) Natura" (paper presented at the meeting for OLMeet | Officelayout Meeting and Talk of Palazzo delle Stelline, Milan, Italia, March 15, 2023).

[6] Bruno De Rivo, "Fluid is the new black" (paper presented at the meeting for OLMeet | Officelayout Meeting and Talk of Palazzo delle Stelline, Milan, Italia, March 15, 2023).

[7] Zigmund Baumann, *Modernità Liquida* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2000).

[8] "21 House of stories hotel citta' studi," Roberto Murgia Architetto, accessed May 20, 2023. https://www.robertomurgia.it/portfolio/21-house-of-stories-hotel-citta-studi/

[9] "Il Progetto," South working, accessed May 15, 2023. https://www.southworking.org/cosa-e-sw/#progetto

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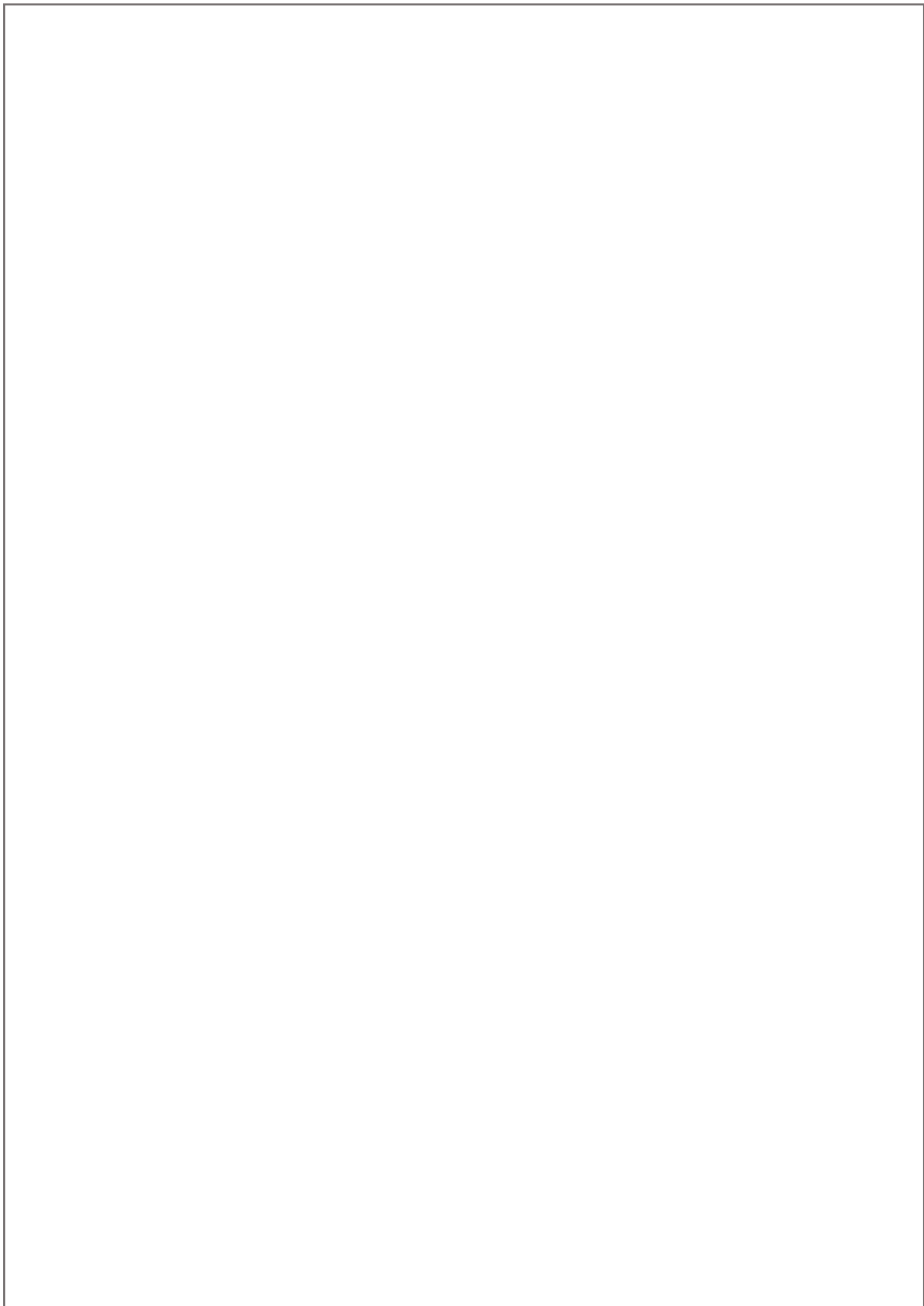
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