

The Office for a Non-Precarious Future

Pavilion of the Czech Republic
at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia – Arsenale, Giardini
20/5—26/11 2023

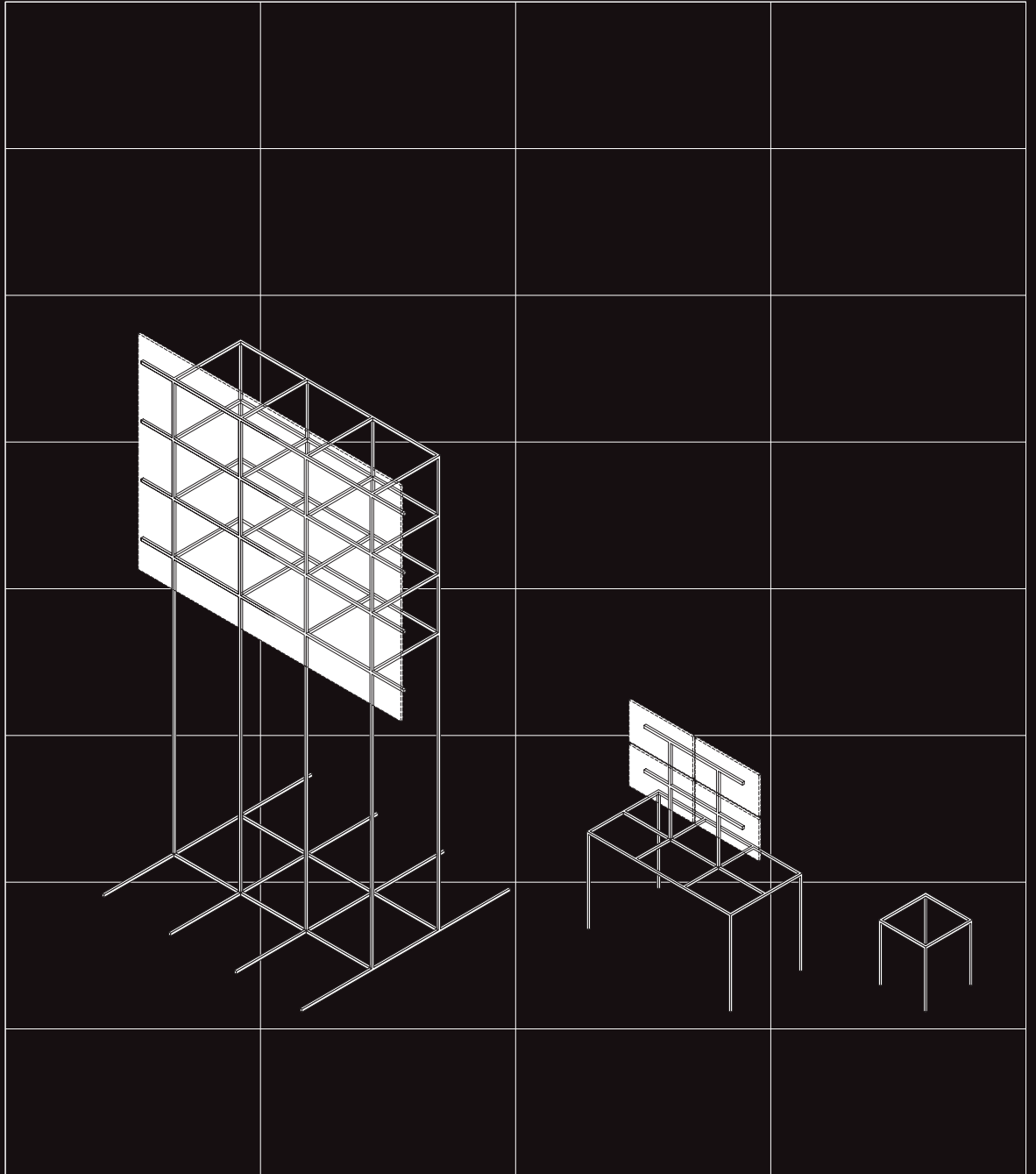
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The Exhibition

Architects are educated in the spirit of the **profession's calling**, the impetus to transform the world through a single act of creative genius. Architecture's daily business is subject to a strictly rational logic of economic growth and the ever-growing production of built substance. However, architects often lack the agency and the tools to instigate real change in society and ecology. In this sense, architecture becomes mere **labour**, an endeavour to secure one's own living in the material sense. **How can we as architects change the world if we can't provide decent working conditions for ourselves?**

The Office for a Non-Precarious Future, set in the Arsenale exhibition space and Giardini, metaphorically takes the form of a **Factory** and a **Laboratory**. The **Factory**, a dystopian environment, reflects the status quo of the profession based on existing research and data in relation to young practitioners' difficult living conditions. The **Factory's** opposite, the **Laboratory**, denotes a space that welcomes experimentation and **work-in-progress**, and enables **cooperation, conversation and actual work**.

<p>The Laboratory provides information on problematic areas in relation to the precarity of the architecture profession: toxic working conditions; diversity, with an emphasis on gender; the notion of authorship; economic pressure and architecture. It suggests tools and solutions, and highlights best-practice examples of individual (discussions/thinkers), collective (collectives, agencies and platforms) and systemic (e.g. legal instruments or teaching) approaches. Visitors are invited to speculate on the non-precarious future of the architecture practice.</p>		<p>A residency programme is launched as a work-in-progress element of the exhibition. The purpose of the residencies is to enable young artists to reflect on the often neglected topic of precarious working conditions within the platform of the Biennale, through which they will receive international feedback. The residents work in the Laboratory to conceive a vision or a code for a better future for the architecture profession.</p>	
		<p>The Czech Pavilion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, organised and supervised by the National Gallery Prague, was supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and by the European Union (Next Generation EU).</p>	



Factory

"Architects are not just financially precarious, with dubious work-life balance, but all wish for more social relevance and enhanced bargaining power in shaping our built environment."

–Peggy Deamer

The factory represents the emblematic production space of the 20th century, associated with **rationalised administration** and **assembly-line** working processes. These reduce the architecture worker to a performer of a singular, **pre-defined monotonous task** and to a follower of the **cult of architecture**. Spatially, an abstract rationalist grid underlies sets of white screens on individual workplaces and the cold steel frames of unusable office furniture.

All data and quotes illustrating the difficult working conditions of young architects are based on the **Research report Working Conditions of Young Architects in Czech Republic** from 2020. As the data reveal in detail, young architects work long hours, have little financial, social and legal stability and security, with resulting dim outlooks for their personal future planning. These are symptoms of precarious working conditions. Precarious work and employment generally do not allow individuals to achieve the standard level of social and political participation in society.



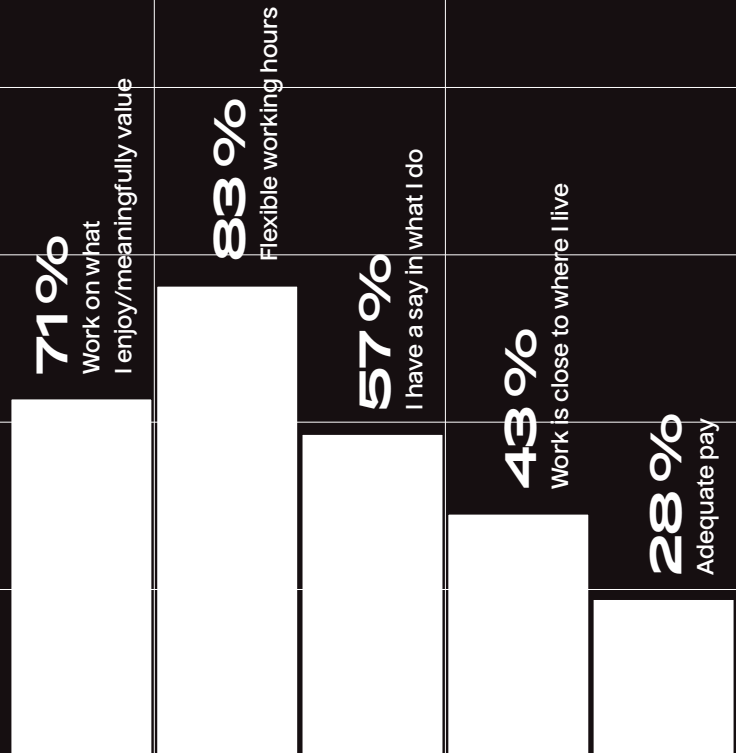
Puoi trovare ulteriori informazioni sul set di dati qui (alcune domande erano a scelta multipla, per questo motivo la somma non è sempre al 100%).

What work benefits do architects have in working freelance?

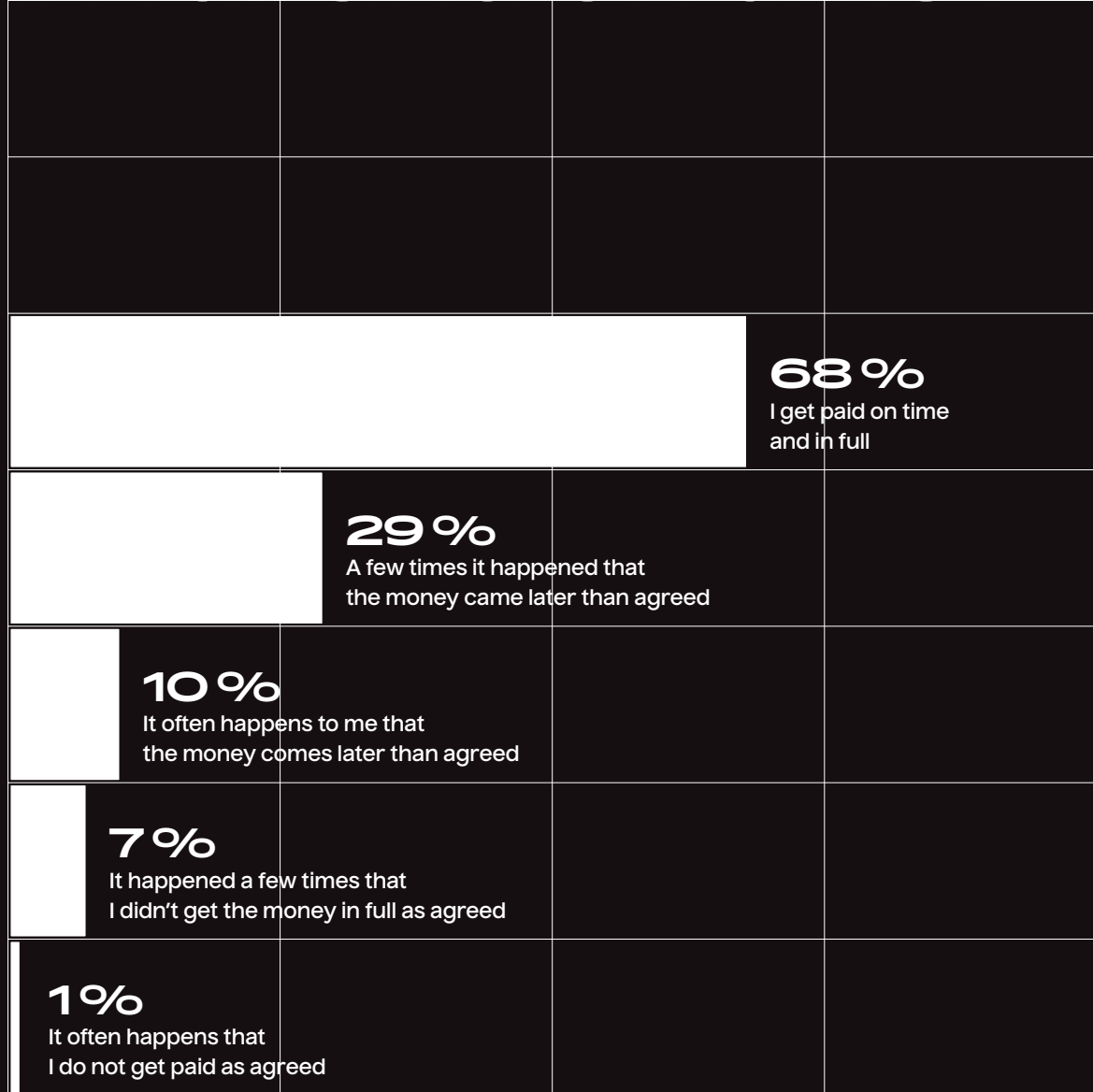
"There are many advantages and disadvantages to being your own boss, but the freedom and opportunity to be creative is definitely worth it."

-anonymous architect

Of those who work on their own/solo:



Do you get paid in full and on time?

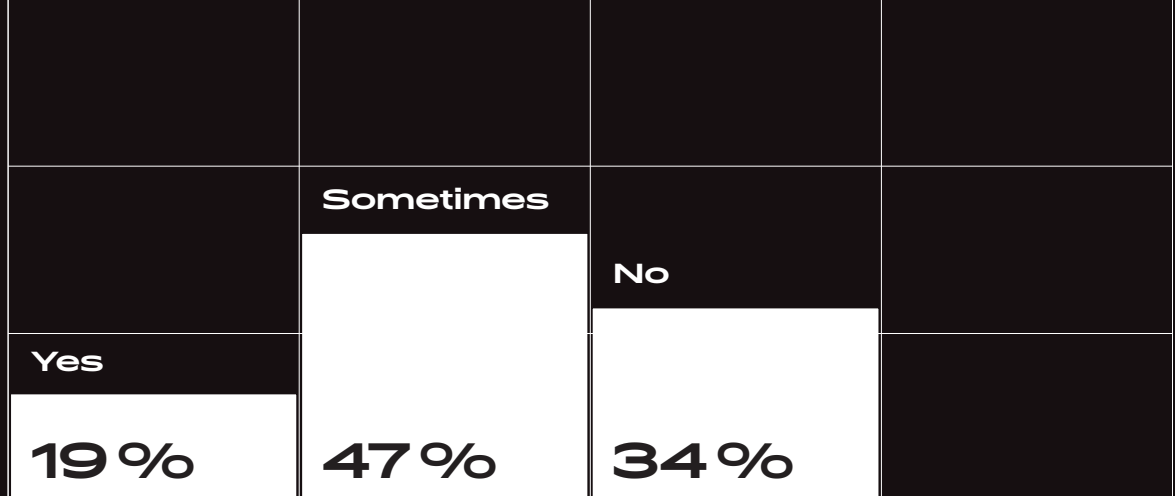


Do you work overtime?

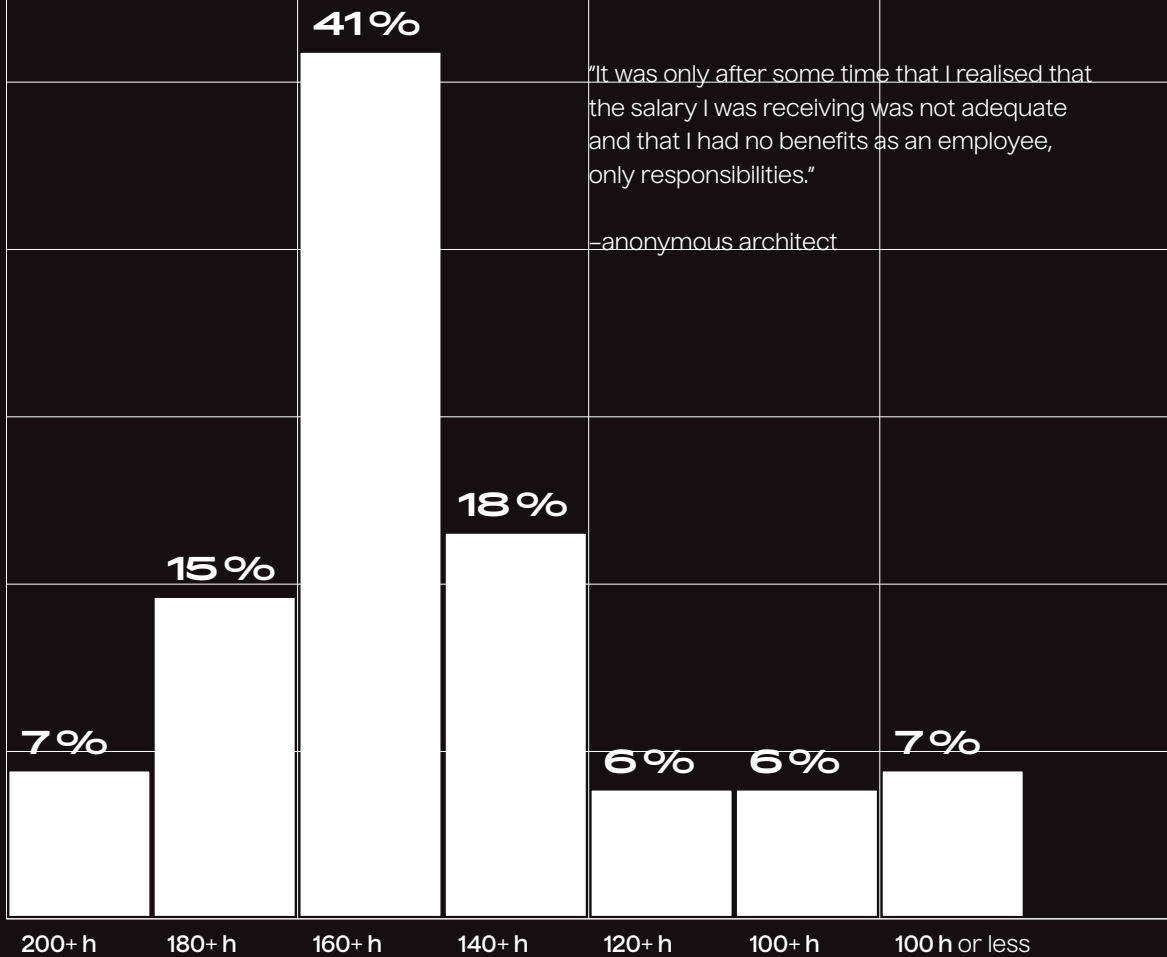
"We work an insane number of hours and virtually have no time for a personal life – vacations or even simple doctor visits worry us because we feel that we are wasting time."

–anonymous architect

Do you work on the weekend?



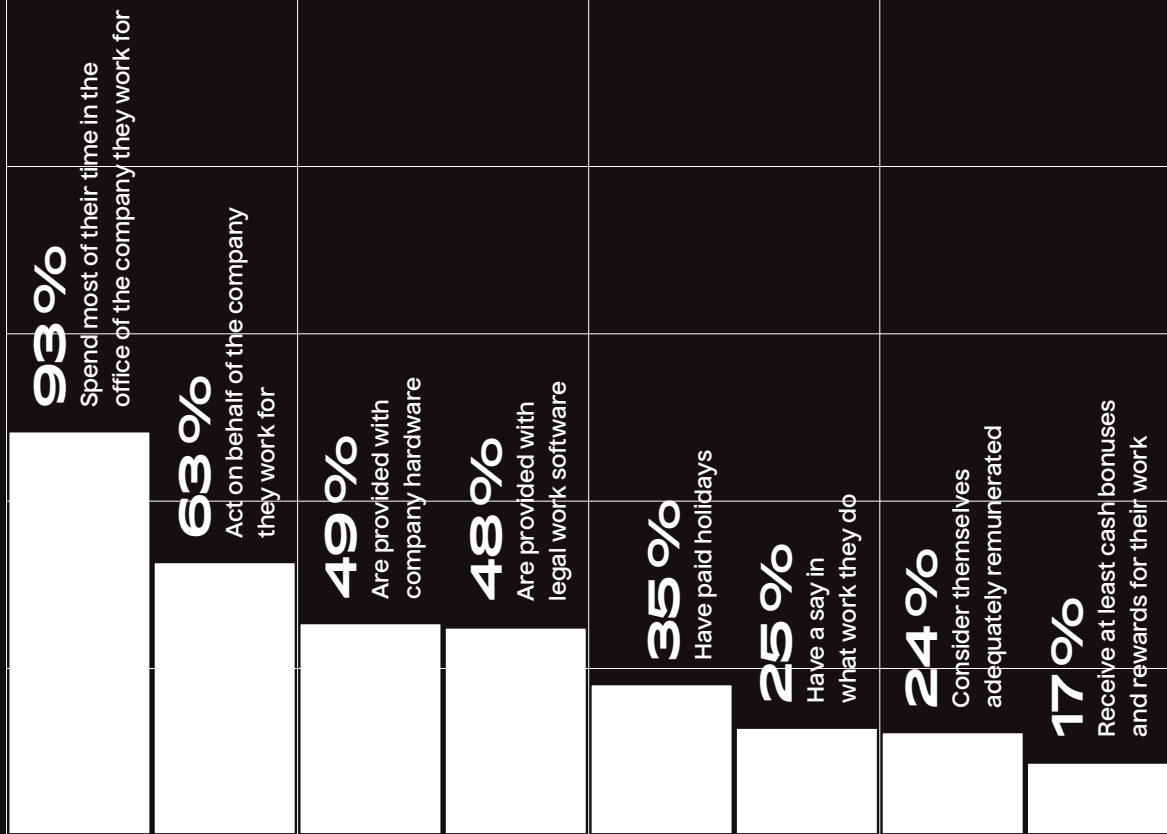
How many hours do you work in a month?



Is your work contracted out legally?



Does your freelance work show symptoms of dependent/fake freelance work?



Do your current working conditions allow planning to have children?

"It's hard to think about having children ... especially since my husband is also an architect and works the same way, but I've accepted that it won't get any better."

-anonymous architect

Total	Women	Men
48 % Cannot imagine	54 % Cannot imagine	42 % Cannot imagine
32 % Can imagine	26 % Can imagine	38 % Can imagine
20 % Don't know	20 % Don't know	20 % Don't know

Have you ever tried to change your working conditions?

30 % Yes, they have changed partially

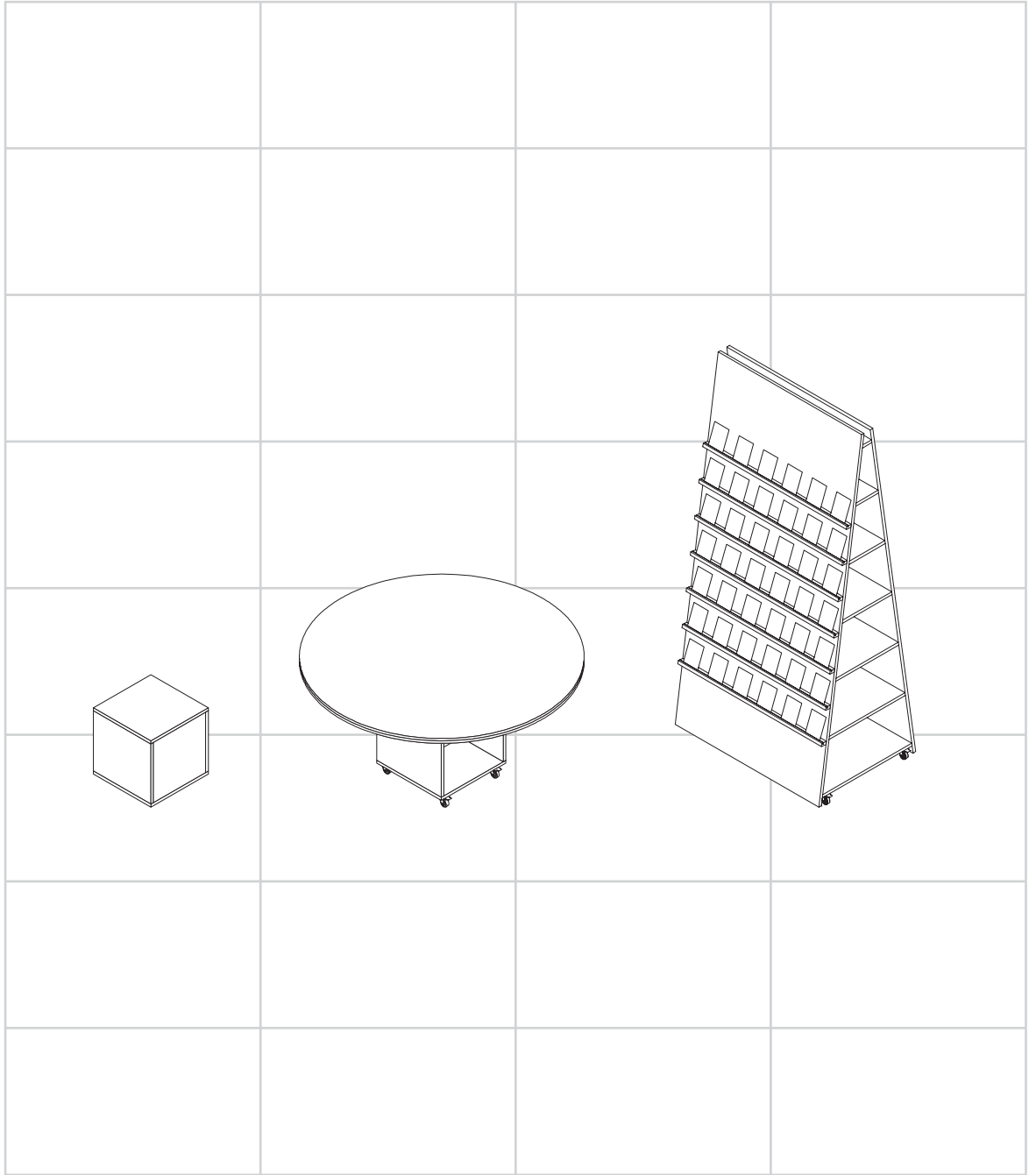
23 % Yes, I have changed them successfully

16 % No, the current working conditions suit me

14 % No, the current conditions do not suit me

12 % Yes, I have left a previous job because of the working conditions

5 % Yes, unsuccessfully



Laboratory

The laboratory in architecture originates with the **Constructivists** and the **Bauhaus**. Such a space served architects to set the discipline on a more experimental but rational basis. The Czech avant-garde architectural theoretician **Karel Teige** considered architecture to be an **interdisciplinary speculative science**, an approach that is relevant today – aiming at the formulation of positive future concepts and even a search for utopias.

The aim of the Laboratory is to create a **work-in-progress**. It critically examines the main problematic areas, searches for alternatives to the status quo and speculates on a non-precarious future for the profession. Our Laboratory aspires to understand the causes and circumstances that contribute to the current state of the profession. Precarity seems to be an all-encompassing theme here, but the Laboratory also presents tools and best practices.

How might we (as architects) participate in creating a better future, if...

...we work in precarious conditions?

The architecture labour market in the Czech Republic forces young architects – graduates (yet) without a licence – to work as **falsely self-employed**. Nearly half of the young Czech architects work in one place, receive a fixed salary and have tasks assigned to them by one person, but they lack employment benefits, e.g. maximum working hours, paid and sick leave and other social security.

...we consider toxic as normal?

Toxic behaviours stem from the absence of boundaries and unhealthy work habits and communication strategies, and can lead to undue stress and health problems. **Toxic environments** are common among hierarchical, performance-oriented organisations where open communication, giving feedback or iterating on processes is not common.

...we learn to labour for love of architecture?

Some architects see their work as a **calling** rather than a **job**. If creating great projects is a life priority, then it doesn't matter how much time is spent at work, whether one is adequately compensated for it or how one is doing health-wise. The habit of working on something important out of love is often abused and **personal boundaries violated**.

...we hustle for authorship?

The quality of realised work equals **social status** within the architectural community. Authorship is important in gaining work. It lends the work a distinct aura. How to deal with authorship in architecture as an intrinsically collective discipline? How can we improve the conditions among individuals who compete for the opportunity to become **the star**?

...the opportunities in architecture are not equal?

Although a woman architect, particularly in today's Europe, does not represent a transgression of social norms, discrimination against women can still manifest itself secondarily. Women in a wide range of fields are less likely to gain the confidence of investors that they can handle larger budgets. Women architects bear the **double burden** of work and care and are confronted with a pay gap and the **glass ceiling**.

...people don't need architecture?

The creation of the built environment takes place without architects. Architecture's long-term share of **turnover** in the construction industry is **less than 1 %**. What is the value of architecture to society?

...the profession is atomised?

Most architects in Europe work as **sole principals**. Most offices in Europe can be described as **micro-businesses**. Because of **atomisation**, there is not much room for **collective bargaining** for better working conditions in the office itself, or for jointly seeking a better future for the profession or the society.

How to change?

"If we wait for governments, it will be too late. If we act as individuals, it will be too little. But if we act as **communities**, it might just be enough, and it might just be in time."

-Rob Hopkins

The exhibition offers tools and best-practice examples of alternative approaches at three levels: **individual, collective and systemic**. At each of these levels, problems manifest themselves differently. Therefore, each level allows for change in a different way, to a different extent and with a different degree of social impact. **Legal norms** set up the rules as predictable working conditions or a decent minimum wage and make sure they are followed. Such current system settings as taxes, gender equality or education may be adjusted. The economic system may be transformed. Architecture can be supported also via **policy-making** and **education**. We are looking for alternatives to current approaches in each area, especially on the individual and collective level.

How can you individually contribute to the change?

1. Care for self
2. Play fair, be kind
3. Follow your gut
4. Ask for help and help others
5. Change your habits and beliefs
6. Listen actively
7. Be aware of the language you use
8. Plan
9. Do something about it, be brave
10. If there is no other way, leave!

How can the **system** contribute to change?

1. Education
2. Policy-making
3. Legal instruments
4. Labour law enforcement
5. Decent minimum wage
6. Collective bargaining
7. Gender and equal opportunities strategy
8. Anti-racism action plan

How can we collectively contribute to the change?

Unite/Network/Organise Cooperate!

Informal Structures

Collectives

The term "collective" refers to the management structure of an organisation regardless of its legal form. There is no exclusive definition of how a practice we could describe as collective should look, yet its key features typically are a lack of hierarchy between the members, who are at least more than three, and cooperation on projects based on multilogues instead of a division of tasks and collective or otherwise fairly distributed authorship of a project, which is often but not inevitably accompanied by the aim to self-initiate projects, to engage interested parties and/or to be involved in the construction process.

Networks

Micro firms make up the majority in architecture (70% in Czech research, 90% in the European Sector Study 2020 and 76% in the AIA Survey in 2018). Within networks, services and infrastructures can be shared, which helps to cope with considerable administrative and financial burdens that big corporations do not feel as strongly. Creating a network enables the individual entities to function better, to share knowledge and to further their impact. The Architectural Lobby and Peggy Deamer have elaborated a vision on how to do this.

Teal organisations

(according to Frederic Laloux)

Teal organisations show the best long-term results, despite giving employees both trust and freedom, based on research by Frederic Laloux. The smallest self-organising unit should have up to 12 people. These self-organising structures have a coach to help them where they fall short on their own. The work time is divided into producing, group decision-making and learning soft skills. Humanity is at the core of the organisation. Others are humans first, co-workers or customers second.

Initiatives

Platforms

Interest groups

Associating with like-minded people can establish common ground on one of the profession's key issues. A community can offer many forms of mutual support in what members lack or struggle with within the architectural industry, profession or education. An interest group can bring attention to, and offer solutions for, problems within the industry affecting a particular group of architecture workers.



Teal

self-management, wholeness, evolutionary purpose

Green

empowerment, values-driven culture, stakeholder value

Orange

innovation, accountability, meritocracy

Amber

replicate processes, a table organisation chart

Red

division of labour, top-down authority

Legal Bodies

Cooperatives

As a legal form, a cooperative is an enterprise owned, run and controlled by and for its members. It is driven by values such as self-help or responsibility, democracy, equality, solidarity and social and environmental justice. Cooperatives exist mainly to reach the common economic, social or cultural goals they set for themselves, not simply to increase profits.

Unions

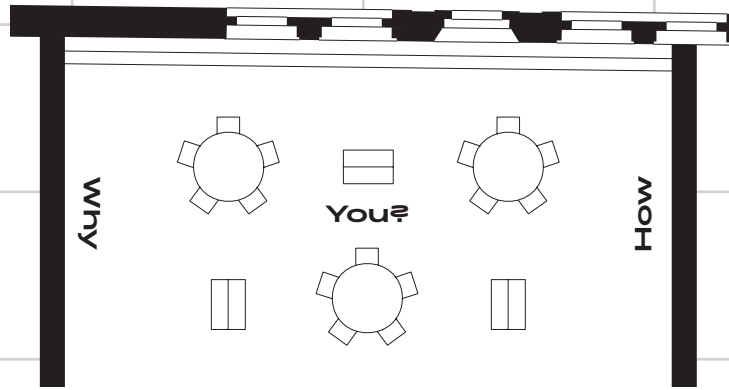
Workers can form unions to bargain collectively. Unions make it possible to negotiate better working conditions while minimising individual risks. Thanks to the fact that they are anchored in the law within the methods of organisation named here, unions are a guarantee of a place in the framework of political negotiations. Unions in architectural firms are not common yet, and profession-wide unions may have difficulty finding a partner to bargain with. However, architects can negotiate their needs with official professional regulatory bodies, collectively exert pressure on employers and advocate for their members in conflicts with employers.

Chambers of Architecture

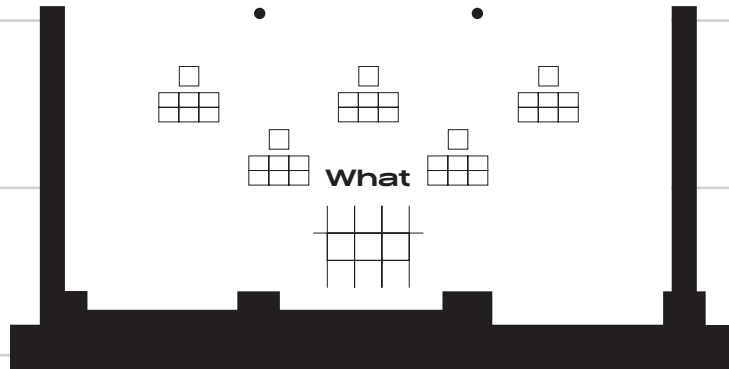
There are official regulatory bodies for architecture in many countries. Their main task is to ensure that their members have the education and knowledge that is adequate and necessary to pursue the profession. Could these bodies also be the place where architects discuss better working conditions?

The Exhibition Plan

Laboratory



Factory



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