RESEARCH ARTICLE

Flow architecture for sustainable homes, office buildings, community centers and museums: In memory of Professor Mihály Csikszentmihalyi and poet Géza Szőcs

Zsadány Vécsey^{1,2*}

¹FLIGBY Leadership Simulation and Blended Learning Solution, 27 Meredek St., 1124 Hungary, Budapest, Hungary

²12121 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 525, Los Angeles, CA 90025, USA

*Correspondence: Zsadány Vécsey. Email: info@fligby.com

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ABSTRACT

This trend research article accounts on a unique interdisciplinary collaboration of two highly creative personalities: psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Management at Claremont Graduate University and poet Géza Szőcs, President of the Hungarian Pen Club. Guidelines of Flow architecture were set: a new building should create dynamic spaces, sustain departure and return, bridge timeframes, create balance between lights and colors, and contain elements that surprise people.

Keywords: flow architecture, flow promotional principles, dynamic spaces, balance of light and color, and bridge timeframes.

1. Introduction

Known psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi introduced in 1975 the notion of flow state, which is the mental state that enables a person engaged in an activity to reach the feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in what he or she is doing. Flow represents the complete absorption in what one does and causes a transformation in the person's sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

This notion evolved over the years into the science of Positive psychology, which aims to improve quality of life by considering positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promises. It also intends to prevent pathologies, which arise when life is barren and meaningless (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Over the past decade I have been running a workshop that attempts to implement the leadership development tasks expressed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the framework of an online educational interactive movie.

A breakthrough development of our project happened in fall 2020, when we were approached by Hollywood's largest interactive movie technology company, and we agreed to set up a joint venture, partly in Hungary, to make together attitude-forming interactive films. We also agreed to create a special layer for existing interactive films, which would provide an opportunity to translate these decision databases or data streams into behavior patterns or group role characteristics. It represents a favorable development, as it shows promise to open another segment of the learning development market.

2. Interdisciplinary collaboration between two extraordinary intellectuals

When psychologist Csikszentmihalyi met poet Géza Szöcs in Budapest, in 2018, they discussed features of the iconic North American museum building, the Getty Center in Los Angeles, which was designed with Professor Csikszentmihalyi's active participation.

The reason for approaching Professor Csikszentmihalyi was to solve the problem of not overwhelming people by the many objects exhibited in the museum. Therefore, the museum was built so that visitors go into a large room to watch an exhibit, and every time they move on, rather than stepping on a hallway, they end up on a big terrace, with an overall view of Los Angeles and of the Pacific Ocean. It was Csikszentmihalyi's suggestion to structure the building, such that one should always get in and out, where some fresh breeze gets onto your face, and then return to a different exhibition. This innovative approach inspired Géza Szöcs's imagination, so that they

agreed to start gathering the basic principles that would define Flow architecture.

3. Guiding principles of low architecture

Their joint project advanced to the point, where the meaning of flow architecture was defined. In this design, the emphasis is on the users of a building, and enable them to experience flow from time to time. This represents a big challenge, as the flow cannot be triggered directly, one should create the conditions for generating this special state of mind.

Csikszentmihályi and Szöcs posed the question on the kind of built spaces to create and materials to use, and how the building should relate to its surroundings to secure flow conditions. Benefits had to be defined, as it was necessary to show, what advantages does it offer to residents and users, how the flow state of mind can be created.

One of the most interesting correlations is that individual performance increases significantly upon entering the flow state. For example, results can be obtained in an expedited manner, stress can be reduced significantly, creativity increases, and it yields a lasting mental satisfaction.

For avoiding anxiety, one may decide to deny reality, which causes burn out or reduce challenges to prevent flow. To produce flow state, one must increase challenges to reach a level of alert and focused stimulation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Figure 1. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's model of flow, considering challenge and ability (Source: Souders, 2021)

Flow architecture can provide positive outcomes, which are desirable in any industry. Based on these, Mihály Csikszentmihalyi and Géza Szöcs agreed on the real content of flow architecture, which does not comprise rules, procedures, or regulations, but rather constitute guiding principles. For example, they were not looking for the right answer, but intended to address the right questions, and tried to determine what the identity of a building should be based on flow.

For initiating the project, one should consider the input elements, including functionality and environment of the

building, and the features of people, who would be residing in or accessing the planned buildings. Not at least, the budget for implementation needs to be evaluated. Other important input data is what basic principles should the building suggest. These principles have been named flow promotional principles. Five promotional principles have been defined for creating the conditions for flow and rendering the project under consideration sustainable.

Another important consequence of meeting flow conditions is that a building's functionality can rise to a higher level by enabling people, who spend time in the building to enter more likely and more often in flow state. Five principles of flow architecture were defined, as listed below.

Create dynamic spaces

Any building may evolve with people's goals, demands, and life situations. For residential buildings, one should create a living space, which changes with the needs of the family residing in it. A common challenge is that by the time, when a person owns a large house that would accommodate all family members, there will be roughly one couple left in the family home. How can this be dynamized so that a building would not only be built and remain unchanged but can adjust dynamically to the needs of the people.

Figure 2. Example of a dynamic interior. (Photo: Jonathan Borba).

Sustain departure and return

Design of the building must encourage people to start something and for this, to leave their home, but the same design should be attractive enough to motivate people to return. This constitutes a sort of Csikszentmihalyi's *ars poetica*. Hence, the building should provide a motivation for going out in the world, make discoveries, experience adventures, but it should also wait people back. Buildings should inspire people to learn new things, but also provide a place, where one prefers to return, as it accommodates and provides security.

Provide balance between natural and artificial lights and different colors

To secure wide-range balance of lights and colors was Géza Szócs's poetic idea. Csikszentmihalyi added that one should also ensure some balance between the constantly changing mental states of people. Only notes exist on the mental balance, which need to be interpreted.

Bridge timeframes

An important finding is that the buildings represent time levels and forms a bridge between different time planes. Buildings should connect the past and future, by being located in between them, such that the building embodies the present, and introduces the feeling of the present in the reasoning of people. Should not be excessively modern, but must stand for cultural heritage and traditions, has "to come" from somewhere and still serve our present.

Surprise people

Professor Csikszentmihalyi emphasized that a building can create flow state if it can surprise its residents and users. This can be the result of structural details that are not entirely predictable, which are not necessarily clear, but can act as an element of surprise.

The first half of this work was completed, so these guiding principles were defined. Géza Szócs's vision to complete this project by discussing it a series of leading architects, and by considering their overall opinion and specific suggestions. Given that Géza Szócs passed away in November 2020 and of Mihály Csikszentmihalyi in October 2021, this creative process stopped, and would need to be completed by their disciples.

4. Thoughts on an unprecedented brainstorming

Let me share briefly my personal experience gained in the process of elaborating the guiding principles of flow architecture. It was an incredible experience, when a

world class psychologist met a creative polymath poet, an event which is very seldom, if not unprecedented.

Two genii took on a scientific field in which they had not been involved previously. This represents a value-based thinking, which would be worth to apply in the future for creating breakthrough ideas and devising paradigm-changing principles

One should mention here FLOW Architecture, a company started in 2013 and headquartered in London, England. According to their homepage, FLOW is a design studio operating at the interface of architecture, interiors, and design research. They are aiming to revisit fundamental relationships between human habitats and the larger environment, and they design spatial experiences. Flow studio regards buildings as adaptive systems that shall respond to the continuously changing features of the building's surroundings (FLOW Architecture, 2021). A justified task is to explore in depth the connection of this company to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's original

5. Mihaly Robert Csikszentmihalyi

(1934 –2021) was a Hungarian-American psychologist, who recognized and named the psychological concept of flow, which represents a highly focused mental state beneficial to productivity. As a Distinguished Professor, Csikszentmihalyi conducted his research at the Department of Psychology and Management at Claremont Graduate University. Formerly he served as head of the department of psychology at the University of Chicago and of the department of sociology and anthropology at Lake Forest College.

Csikszentmihalyi performed notable work in studying happiness and creativity, however, he was best known for creating the notion of flow. He has become the world's leading researcher on positive psychology. His works are influential and are widely cited. Hence, his pivotal paper entitled "Positive psychology - An introduction" (co-author: Seligman, M.E.P., *American Psychologist*, 2000, 55 (1), 5-14. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.56.1.89) has received by November 2021 over 6,070 citations.

6. About Géza Szőcs

(1953-2020) was a Hungarian poet, writer, polymath, and politician, born in Transylvania, Romania. He published over 25 volumes of poetry, novels, drama, and essays, several of them being translated to numerous languages (including English, Chinese, Russian, German, and Romanian). For 2 years (2010-2012) he served as Secretary of State for Culture of the Ministry of National Resources in Hungary.

Szőcs was awarded several literary prizes, including Writers' Union of Romania Debut Award (1976), Robert

Graves Prize (1986), Milán Füst Prize (1986), Book of the Year (1990), Tibor Déry Prize (1992), Gabriel Bethlen Prize (1993), Attila József Prize (1993), Award for Hungarian Art (2006), Writers' Union of Romania's Award for his novel *Limpopo* (2008), Prize of the European Academy of Vienna (2009), Hungary Laurel Wreath Award (2013), Kossuth-Prize (2015), and Széchenyi-heritage document (2020)

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