Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:

The role of Psychological Flexibility in the architecture of the therapeutic environment. The case of the Maggie’s Cancer Care Centre

• Author(s) Name:

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• University or Company Affiliation:

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• Abstract (300 words):

That the built environment influences people and their well-being is now widely recognized. As inherent part of the programme of the Maggie’s Cancer Care Centre, which provides practical and psychological support in UK and elsewhere, the demand for sophisticated architectural design has proved to be a key component of the project’s success. Being a healthcare facility, the already relatively long literature existing on the non-clinical Maggie’s Centre, founded by Maggie and Charles Jencks in 1995, refers to its current 23 buildings as therapeutic environments, debating whether or not architects have enough knowledge of healing architecture in their design practice. Maggie’s CEO, however, disregards the fact that, when she commissions an architect, she asks him/her to design a ‘therapeutic environment’ since she thinks that it would be assumptive to think that the organization could ‘heal’ cancer-patients. Nevertheless, just those feelings of encouragement and agency that cancer-patients experience so to find ways to tolerate what was to them intolerable before, are the expression of an effective condition
of the building: the psychological impact generated from the bespoke architecture in synergy with people’s presence enables a flexible state of mind in its users to ultimately constitute a therapeutic environment. The research is about the contribution of Architecture in facilitating physical and emotional well-being within the Maggie’s Centre, the consequence of design methodology on the in-it-enabled state of Psychological Flexibility to constitute an effective therapeutic environment, and the lesson the Architects can learn from this study in informing the design of their future buildings.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Frisone is a PhD researcher and Associate Lecturer in Interior Architecture at Oxford Brookes University. She has conducted research on experiential representation within the educational frame. As interior educator, she has taught architectural design developing themes such as furnitecture, spatial fields, atmospheres with exposure of the students’ work through ‘dioramas’ (pictorial 3D-models as perceptual, atmospheric, emotional representation) in public settings (exhibitions and symposiums) in Oxford and London. Her doctoral thesis is studying how Architecture affects people and how dramatically improves their wellbeing if well designed. In this work the level of ‘therapeuticity’ of a healthcare facility (Maggie’s Cancer Care Centre) has been tested to inform Architects how to design an effective therapeutic environment, but also how to create atmospheres and experiential spaces in a more general setting. By studying how people gather and move within the space, the research aims to identify the positive flexible state of mind (Psychological Flexibility) enabled in Maggie’s users by ‘the synergy between people and place’. Mrs Frisone has also worked on a range of public projects intended to decrease environmental stress in ‘crowded places’. This work is presented for the first time but aspires to enter other design conferences within the field of wellbeing.