Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
  Experience-based cartography: lessons about the ecology of mental health

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• Abstract (300 words):
  In the age of climate change, mental and environmental health are necessarily entwined. This paper reflects on the ecology of their relationship through the concrete examples found on the site of GGz De Grote Beek, the Netherlands. In the context of mental healthcare, perception, behaviour and governance are in their strongest as ecological agents. The object of this reflection will be a collection of 56 maps that visualise the ground conditions of the site, the clients and visitors that inhabit it, the institution that governs it, and the narratives that connect the three. A selection of topics will be brought into consideration, and conclusions will be drawn on the intertwined conditions of mental and environmental health in urban green areas.

  1. Behaviour & Landscaping: Inability to control behaviour triggers the increase in control over the landscape’s nature.
  2. Landmarks & Healing: At each stage of healing the clients regain independence and access to new activities and places – those become landmarks and symbols of the client community.
3. Fragmentation & Disturbance: Like barriers and fences, disturbance such as noise or traffic, enforces the fragmentation in the way the landscape is perceived. Thus, some parts begin to ‘disappear.’

4. Biodiversity & Fear: Giving space to nature, opens space for illegal activities. Creating a fear that keeps regular users from visiting some parts of the park, which in turn reinforces the concept of leaving nature alone.

5. Water & Pleasure: The urge to enjoy lighting a camp-fire exacerbates the risk of forest fire as the more desolate areas of the park, are where the soil is driest.

This paper is based on an ongoing design-based research on GGz De Grote Beek – an 117ha urban park in Eindhoven, home to a mental health facility of 2000 staff, 13000 clients. The project explores spatial and narrative strategies that can inform the site’s transformation as a sustainable, healing environment.

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

Kornelia Dimitrova (1990) is an architect, researcher and lecturer based in Eindhoven (NL). She graduated in Architecture at TU Eindhoven in 2015, and was nominated for Archiprix NL (2016) and Archiprix International (2017). Her projects explore the speculative and performative potential of architecture. In 2019, she developed the Moral Lab with Bernhard Lenger - a spatial research tool designer for collecting moral data as part of the ongoing research of Dr Bart Wernaart, Fontys School of Applied Sciences. The installation is deployed during Dutch Design Week 2019. She is teaching at Architecture Theory and Design at Fontys Academy in Tilburg since 2018. In 2015-18, she taught at the Architectural History and Theory chair at Bergische Universität Wuppertal with Christoph Grafe. Currently, she also teaches Architectural Theory, part-time at Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Tilburg. Apart from her academic commitments, she is designer and head of research of Foundation We Are, a creative agency that brings design thinking into the practices of lawyers and human rights defenders. Since December 2018, she is a PDEng trainee at Eindhoven University of Technology, elaborating a set of speculative scenarios about the future transformation of Landgoed De Grote Beek as a sustainable, healing environment.