

Aspects of Healing Space in Social Reforms

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ABSTRACT: Healing space is a complex concept that has become a targeted problem in the healthcare system and overall therapy all over the world in the last two decades. From ancient times, healing spaces were an active preoccupation of people. The fire dances and storytelling were therapeutic. Greeks constructed a healing city in Epidaurus, and sacred spaces were found all over the world. In modern times, there has been a growing interest in the last two decades in enhancing the healing process using environmental design elements, cultural elements and spiritual dimension. Nature and physical activities like tending horses or gardening, architectural elements, sunlight, air, integration of technology and healthy relationships like nurse-patient, therapist-patient or family relationships are key ingredients to cultivate rapid health recovery. A patient-centered holistic healing perspective is considered in the healthcare system and therapy. This study analyzes the various aspects of healing space, emphasizing its relevance in the context of social reforms in healthcare and therapy.

KEYWORDS: healing space, sacred space, healing environment, art therapy, patient-centered healing

1. Introduction

Health was one of modernism's central motifs, from the improvement of the built environment and the formulation of the aesthetic theory to the institution of social reform (Schrank and Didem 2016, 1). Considering the well-being of human beings, almost everything matters in order to create a space for healing: the physical elements of the room, the noise, the light, the air, nature view, and physical activities. Healing Space is described in terms of the physical attributes of the space, the feelings that the space evokes, the familiarity of the space, its relationship to nature, spiritual or religious significance, and as a space where people feel cared for by attentive staff (MacAllister, Bellanti and Sakallaris 2016, 123).

Recently, the design for healthcare environments has begun to include esthetic enhancements in order to reduce stress and anxiety, increase patient satisfaction and promote health and healing. Recent research created a hierarchy of effects of environmental elements ranging from nontoxic to safe (both physically and psychologically) to the one that provides a positive context and is actively salutogenic (Schweitzer, Gilpin, and Frampton 2004). Despite knowing the role of design and the built environment in creating health and well-being, there is not enough attention given to this fundamental aspect (Yeang and Dilani 2022, 88).

1.1. Healing space in antiquity

Sacred space has been a well-known healing environment for body, mind and soul since antiquity. In the fifth century BCE, Greeks built a healing city at Epidaurus. While the primary healing activity took place in the Asklepian temple, the entire city was utilized as a healing environment; they used two evidence-based principles of modern healthcare design: views of nature and the incorporation of light. Other buildings part of the healing journey in Epidaurus were the baths (for purification, relaxation, and hygiene purposes), the Abaton (for dream healing), Theater (for overcoming adversity), stadium (viewing athletes compete, overcome adversity, for communal bonding), gymnasium (for physical exercise), monuments (testimonials) for pilgrim cure, worshipping the gods and goddesses and the banqueting hall (meals, baths, exercise). [fig. 1]

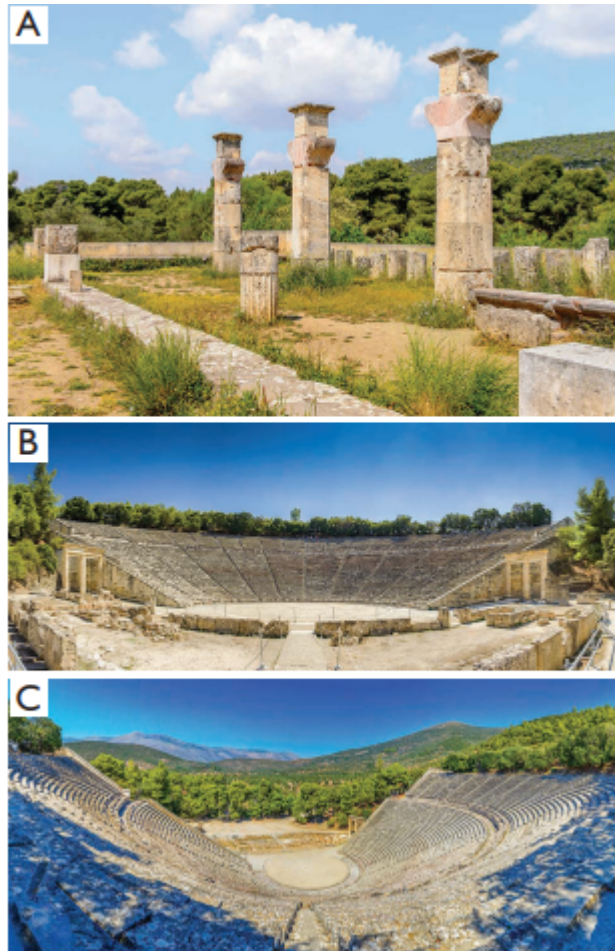


Figure 1. Image of the theater at Epidaurus, Greece. (A) This image is of the ruins of the Abaton, the place where sleeping or “incubation” and dream healing occurred at Epidaurus, Greece (Photo Credit: Anton Ivanov-Shutterstock); (B and C) image of the theater at Epidaurus, Greece (Photo Credit: Kotsovolos Panagiotis-Shutterstock)

Later in Japan, the tea ritual was used for healing traumatized warriors during the civil wars in Kamakura Period (1185-1392) (Alt 2017, 284-7). [fig. 2]



Figure 2. Japanese tea garden pavilion at the Chicago Botanic Gardens

1.2. Healing space and cultural elements

Storytelling is an ancient way of healing, like music, especially around fire. Navajo coyote tales are examples of stories that make people laugh and teach people how to behave, but are a medicine intended to knit things together (Saliba 2000, 38).

In Canada's healthcare system, especially in rheumatology, there is an active interest in including indigenous healing practices for indigenous patients (Logan et al. 2020, 5). In Mexico, cultural arts create healing space for Mexican youth (children) who live mixed-status experiences, especially chronic fear (Hernandez-Arriaga 2017, 2). Art therapy is founded on the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing. Art therapists are professionals trained both in art and psychotherapy (Ferrara 2004, 3).

1.3. Healing Space in therapy

Healing space is needed in psychotherapy sessions considering the healing relationships between therapist and client (Elsass 1993, 333-42). Psychologist Adwoa Akhu shares thoughtful design suggestions as well as meditations and rituals rooted in African and multicultural traditions that enable to create serenity and positivity in living places and therapist cabinets (Akhu 2016). "True healing is not a state where we become liberated from feeling, but freer and flexible to experience it more fully," writes Dr. Matt Licata. "When we experience our suffering consciously, it reveals sacredness and beauty we might not expect. Healing will always surprise us" (Licata 2020).

Numerous projects for the integration of technology in therapy have been conducted in the last two decades. One of them is *Healing Spaces* at the University of Southern California's Interactive and Games Division. This is a project as part of Gabriela Gomes's Master of Fine Arts thesis work. It is used for older adults suffering from advanced dementia where healing spaces prove to ameliorate the behavioral and psychological symptoms (Gomes et al. 2020, 1-2) [fig. 3]



Figure 3. Forest environment brought to life in the physical space
Image credits: Gabriela Purri R. Gomes

2. Healing space and elements of an optimal healing design

The healthcare system was focused primarily on healing the body, but we now have a growing recognition that the healthcare system could promote and achieve holistic healing. There are six groups of environmental variables that have proven to directly affect or influence one or more dimensions of healing. These variables are: homelike environment, access to views and nature,

light, noise control, barrier-free environment and room layout. It seems that healing spaces have power over body, mind and spirit (DuBose et al. 2018, 43-56).

Nature. One good way of self-healing is using gardening. Tending the garden - from clearing to planting to harvesting - becomes a metaphor for cultivating the soul in Marilyn Barrett's evocative "Creating Eden." In the lovely and moving essays gathered together here, Barrett invites us into the healing space she created in her own backyard, encourages us to create our own places of beauty and peace, and shows us how, in a time of illness and stress, she used gardening to restore her health and balance. And she shows us how any garden - be it a window box of herbs or garden of the imagination - can yield a harvest of serenity (Barrett 1997).

Another example of self-healing using nature is Esther Sternberg. Gail Sheehy said about her: "Esther Sternberg is a rare writer—a physician who healed herself...With her scientific expertise and crystal-clear prose, she illuminates how intimately the brain and the immune system talk to each other, and how we can use place and space, sunlight and music, to reboot our brains and move from illness to health."

In recent years, natural healing space studies have been done in health and forestry (Park and Lee 2016, 75). Green spaces, whether urban or forest, have an increased potential for healing regardless of culture or location (Engineer, Ida, and Sternberg 2020, 3). The health of the environment is closely linked to personal health. A researcher in the 1980's observed that patients with a view to nature healed faster than those without. So, designing hospitals, communities, and neighborhoods that promote healing and health for all could be the future in healthcare (Sternberg 2009). High dense urban environments create stress from noise and crowding and affect mentally and physically the people living especially in South Asia over-crowded cities like Hong Kong and Singapore. The solution is creating indoor and outdoor healing factors in environment design (Xue and Gou 2018). In Guangdong province, China, a study of the landscape environment in 10 hospitals showed that participants need a quiet place, safe and private environment that includes visual healing, rehabilitation activities, shading and heat preservation and medical escort (Guo et al. 2023, 1).

Air. Improving Indoor air quality (IAQ) is one of the goals of the UN (United Nations). So proper cleaning staff training is necessary because the use of chemicals in energy strategies creates pollution risks (Gola, Settimo, and Capolongo 2019, 2).

Sunlight. In the nineteenth century, sunlight and open windows were thought to be the most effective means of purifying the air and killing the bacteria causing tuberculosis. In the first part of the twentieth century, architects who designed homes and hospitals took advantage of the sun in order to create a healing space (Sternberg 2009, 4-5).

Relationships. Healing appears as a deeply personal experience that emerges from a suitably fertile, relational, social, biological, and cultural ecology, a *healing landscape*, and is not limited to particular clinical encounters and/or healthcare sites (Miller and Crabtree 2005, 42). Miller tells the story of a man who contracted AIDS and found the healing landscape only when he found a doctor who accepted him as he was. Encouraged by his sister to live in order to take her to the altar when she would get married, this man reconstructed his personal (new room environment) and professional life (healthy relationships with boss and coworkers). The constellation of elements that combined create the healing landscape is formed from multiple healthy relationships, environmental elements and healing places.

The concept of the environment has been considered central in nursing's paradigm, so the nurse's place in client-environment process is rather with the client in order to pattern the environment that promotes healing and comfort (Quinn 1992, 26). The patient and the practitioner are both notes of the same sheet of music (Perri 2014, 16).

Physical activities. In 2008, inadequate physical activity was the cause of over 3.2 million deaths worldwide and now is considered the fourth primary cause of mortality and significant contributor to societal health loss (Marques, McIntosh, and Kershaw 2019, 20). Only both hardship and joy can lead us back to the sacredness of ordinary life (Licata 2020), restore relationships and create a healthier environment for a better social life.

2.1. Healing spaces for youth and children

Nature, color, noise, music, lighting, spatial crowding, art, and physical environment impact the well-being and healing in pediatric healthcare, but is needed to contextualize and separate the design variables so the individual and combined impacts reflect holistic design recommendation (Gaminiesfahani, Lozanovska and Tucker 2020, 99).

Spatial experience was evident in the architectural practice of the ancient world. There were developed four examples of architecture specialized in healing young adults and children (Asfour 2020, 133). McGill University Health Centre states that patient and family are central to participation in the healing process "the built environment is a tool in the healing process in order to complement and enhance the skills, expertise, caring dimension and high-tech support of caregivers." This declaration reflects a growing acceptance of the notion that a human centered approach and the quality of hospital space are now considered very important for medical care outcomes. San Diego Children Hospital's official recently admitted: "design is now an essential strategic element for our future" (Risse 2003, 2).

The young black people need, according to some studies, *a healing place of refuge* in order to reconcile, confront and heal from psychic wounds (Brown 2016, 283). In 2008, the Canadian government invested 250.000 \$ in a program that aimed to assist youth in trouble with the law to recover from illicit drug abuse. Tending horses was involved. Three key themes showed the capacity to heal: spiritual exchange, complimentary communication and authentic occurrence (Dell et al. 2011).

2.2. Healing spaces for elderly people and veterans

For elderly persons, the therapeutic landscape contains connection to public green space and physical exercises in nature that are part of a targeted design which facilitates accessibility, inclusivity and sociability (Marques, McIntosh, and Kershaw 2019, 29).

Veterans have high rates of physical, mental and behavioral health challenges as well as higher chronic pain, so the Veterans' Health Administration (VHA) shifted from a traditional healthcare to a Whole Health (WH) approach in order to provide personalized and holistic healthcare experience for veterans mainly with gardening activities and agriculture (this was a practice for soldiers to work in hospital gardens since the end of World War 1) (Besterman-Dahan et al. 2021, 1). Places that are used today in healing using their history are: The Brion Tomb, San Vito d'Altivore, Italy, Du Sable Urban Ecology Sanctuary (unbuilt), Chicago, Illinois and The Veterans Memorial Building, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Alt 2017, 289-291).

2.3. Healing space and spiritual dimension

In addition to the contribution of healing spaces, there is a spiritual contribution that through prayer the sick can find healing. The history of divine healing is very vast, starting from biblical times, but we have recent testimonies that confirm healing in healthy physical, emotional and spiritual environments. In 1876, Miss Harriet M. Barker, while attending the nation's centennial celebration, contracted typhoid, and in a few years, her condition was declared incurable. But in time of sickness in her healing space at home, she found the way to life and healing by praying to God (Curtis 2006,

598). Equally, if not more important, many women were responsible for the health of their household, diagnosing, prescribing and preparing medicines at home. We will never know the full extent of women's healthcare practice in early modern England, but women were a substantial portion of practitioners (Fissel 2009, 153). After more than a century from Azusa Street revivals and the shift in the landscape of Christian healing practices, alongside unprecedented achievements in medical science, nearly 80 percent of Americans report believing that God supernaturally heals people in answer to prayer. Individuals who need healing, even after trying the best medical cures, readily transgress ecclesiastical, physical, and social boundaries in their quest for health and wholeness (Brown 2006 631).

3. Conclusions

Environmental elements are considered important to create a healing space in these modern times, an era of high-density cities and a need for social reconnection. Nature view, physical activities, air quality, noise moderation, sunlight's healing power and healthy nurse/doctor/therapist-patient relationships have an important impact in designing the optimal healing space, considering cultural and spiritual dimension in a holistic healthcare approach. The contribution of faith (Rotaru 2012, 5) remains an important point in this healing landscape that integrates the healthcare system, therapy, cultural contribution and spiritual dimension (Rotaru 2017, 57-76). Even from antiquity, people were concerned in the restoration of body, soul, mind and spirit. Storytelling and fire dances were part of primitive therapy. Healing centers were built, like healing city of Epidaurus, in ancient Greece. Japanese had tea ritual in garden pavilions for healing traumatized soldiers, later, tending the hospital gardens were therapy for soldiers from World War 1 and 2. Gardening, art therapy, environment and cultural elements could be factors that enhance well-being and health recovery. This study emphasizes the need for a thoughtful and patient-centric approach in designing healthcare environments, considering that the healing landscape is very vast and could include some of the elements presented above in a unique combination for each person.

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