

## P4 Reflection

Working on the architectural design project for a psychiatric care hospital as a thesis project has been a deeply insightful and thought-provoking experience. Throughout the process, I've been challenged to consider not only the physical aspects of the built environment but also the profound impact it has on the well-being and experiences of the individuals who inhabit it.

One of the most striking aspects of this project has been delving into the complexities of psychiatric care and understanding the unique and sometimes contradicting needs of patients within these facilities. Through research, fieldwork, and engagement with psychiatric caregivers, I've gained a deeper understanding and awareness for the requirements, restrictions and differences that make psychiatric environments unique to other healthcare facilities. This awareness has informed every aspect of the design process, from layout and spatial organization to material selection and sensory considerations.

Literature research revealed a lack of knowledge and information specific for designing . Most of the current information includes technical guidelines aiming for efficiency, while research that focuses on the relationship between the environment and psychology, are either based on a general healthcare target group or for target groups with specific diagnoses.

Drawing from Suining Ding's insights on environmental design theories for medical healthcare, I've been able to integrate evidence-based design principles for the healthcare environment into the architectural vision for the psychiatric hospital, using the practical guidelines obtained through the fieldwork. This has involved not only creating spaces that are functional and aesthetically pleasing but also prioritizing elements that promote healing, dignity, and inclusion for all users. The fieldwork conducted in psychiatric hospitals in Albania provided invaluable firsthand experience, allowing me to witness the realities of psychiatric care and engage directly with patients, caregivers, and visitors. This immersive experience shed light on the specific needs and challenges faced by users within these facilities, showing how one size fits all is not always relevant.

Perhaps the most significant takeaway from this project is the importance of bridging theoretical frameworks with real-world observations in healthcare design. By grounding our design interventions in evidence-based research and aligning them with the practical realities of psychiatric care, we can create environments that truly meet the needs of users and support their journey towards recovery and well-being.

The proposed design of the project presents a deinstitutionalized approach to psychiatric care by advocating for multiple smaller wards instead of a single large institutional facility. This design concept aims to cultivate a sense of community and belonging, mirroring the atmosphere of a village or neighborhood rather than a traditional hospital setting. Central to this design philosophy is the concept of multiple layers, which serves as the foundational principle guiding the project, aiming to meeting the needs of all patients despite where they are in their journey to recovery.

Research has underscored the importance of balancing autonomy with safety in psychiatric care environments. The design endeavors to prioritize patients' freedom and agency while ensuring their safety and well-being are safeguarded. By fostering a sense of autonomy, patients

are empowered to navigate their surroundings and participate in therapeutic activities at their own pace, promoting a more positive and empowering treatment experience. The placements of multiple doors and the square-like shape of the wards allows for the caregivers to restrict access to each side, depending on situations which require additional safety. The placement of a central courtyard, balconies and multiple windows allows for patients to have an access to nature and its healing effects while being within the safety of the wards.

Furthermore, the emphasis on creating a community-like environment rather than a clinical institution is integral to enhancing patients' sense of self-worth and dignity. The design seeks to imbue the space with a warm and welcoming residential ambiance, where patients feel valued, supported, and connected to others. This shift away from the traditional hospital model aims to destigmatize mental health care and foster a more holistic approach to healing. The choice of the façade ornamentation and materials aids in the creation of a residential atmosphere.

The placement of a community library on the northern side of the facility allows for the community to gain access to education and information regarding mental health and psychiatry, offering ways that they can also come into contact with the patients without risking their safety, or disrupting a patient's recovery journey. Furthermore, the placement of the wards in an urban park setting, helps creating a calmer and more therapeutic environment, aiming to combat the stigmatization that these facilities have, for being places of restriction and isolation, by creating proximity with the city, while the urban green creates a layer of privacy for the patients.

In essence, the overarching goal of the design is to craft a space that feels inherently therapeutic, where patients are not confined by the constraints of traditional institutional settings but rather empowered to engage in meaningful activities and interactions that promote their overall well-being and recovery journey.

The architectural design aspect is always enjoyable for me. But in this studio I have experienced a different approach to designing than in my previous studios with users in center. While before I could have gotten a way with design choices inspired by personal preferences or arguments, in this project I have had to completely step into the shoes of the users I am designing for. Overall the tutoring sessions are quite enjoyable and the tutors are very helpful and insightful.

Another component of the studio is focused on Building Technology, running concurrently with architectural design. This aspect posed particular challenges for me, as I often felt it limits my freedom and creativity. While previous projects in my academic journey have incorporated technical considerations and drawings, I have not had the opportunity to engage in multiple sessions with a Building Technology specialist tutor to assess the feasibility of proposals, thus resulting in gaps in my knowledge. Getting this opportunity in this studio was very beneficial to my process of learning.

Additionally, I encountered challenges with the freedom afforded by the studio, which allowed us to plan our own workflow. My design approach prioritizes keeping opportunities open, as better solutions may emerge through exploration of case studies and research. However, this approach can be counterproductive when faced with soft deadlines, as excessive information-seeking can impede progress. As a result, some days were marked by overworking, while others saw underworking due to feeling stuck.

Moving forward, I aspire to adopt a more disciplined and structured approach to time management. By better scheduling my workflow, I aim to strike a balance between exploration

and productivity, ensuring efficient progress while maintaining the flexibility necessary for creative exploration.

Overall, this project has been a journey of exploration, discovery, and growth. It has reinforced my belief in the transformative power of architecture to positively impact lives and reaffirmed my commitment to designing spaces that prioritize the health, dignity, and happiness of all individuals, particularly those most vulnerable in our society. Engaging in a user-based project has been a humbling experience, as it necessitated a realistic approach grounded in the needs and experiences of the intended users. As architecture students, our ambitions can sometimes lean towards idealism, disconnected from the practicalities of real-world constraints and user perspectives. This project served as a reminder of the importance of balancing idealistic visions with pragmatic and realistic considerations, ultimately enriching my understanding of the complexities inherent in architectural design.