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# New dimensions to Applied Research in FM

by Pekka Matvejeff

**It is increasingly common for organizations to take a more holistic approach to addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of individuals. There is also increasing evidence to suggest that the physical environment can promote healing, good health and well-being. A network of European Universities of Applied Sciences takes a new approach to implementing developments in the modern working environment.**

The IFMP – International Facility Management Program – is a Summer School developed by a collaboration network of eight European Universities of Applied Sciences who offer FM or FM-related degree programs in Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway. The IFMP Program offers students the opportunity to study current and future FM industry trends in greater depth than what would be possible during a regular academic program. In previous years, themes such as “Security Management”, “New Ways of Working” and “Healing Environment” have been studied.

The IFMP Summer School is a six-week intensive study period

divided into two-week sessions held in three of the hosting universities in their respective countries. The first two weeks will serve to lay the groundwork for the chosen theme, with the help of internationally recognized researchers and specialists. The next two weeks will then be used to deepen the student’s learning process through the implementation of various research methods and tools. During the last two weeks, the students will work on a real-life project or problem relevant to the chosen theme.

## Healing Environment

The main topic for the IFMP 2012 was “Healing Environment”. Typically associated with hospital settings, a healing environment is

one that contributes to the occupant’s well-being, both through its design and its functionality.

However, healing environments are not only reserved for healthcare facilities. Many countries today are facing the challenge of a rapidly ageing population. From a socio-demographic point of view, a healing environment is one that enables people to live independently for longer: it is an “age-friendly” environment. Healthy ageing is considered to be one of the most challenging issues facing the countries in the European Union today.

A healing environment should, in fact, be applied to any surroundings in which people work, live, socialize and relax. It can be applied to office buildings universities and schools in order to provide occupants with a healthy work and/or lifelong-learning environment.

During the IFMP Summer School 2012, students got acquainted with the various aspects of a healing environment and the existing methods used to measure its effect on occupants. Implementing the knowledge they had acquired, each of the four project groups developed a toolkit to be used to assess the ‘hardware’ aspects of a healing environment. The toolkits were put to practice in the real-life surroundings of a specific care facility. The research outcomes were then used to make appropriate recommendations for the care facility in question.

## Implementation of Service Design Tools

The results of the IFMP 2012 were so encouraging that the partner

Universities have decided to continue with the “Healing Environment” theme in 2013. The main objective of the IFMP 2013, which will start on the August 8th in Kufstein, Austria, is to emphasise the importance of the role played by the various actors involved in a service organisation for creating an optimal healing environment. There is evidence that Service Design Tools are particularly effective when used to get to the crux of interactions between customers and service providers. The behavior of different parties is observed in this context and an appropriate form of management is developed which can be applied to such situations.

Based on data from the previous year (IFMP 2012), students will be asked to identify the customer (patient) journey within the client organization. There will be a particular focus on Facility Management staff and their roles in this process. Using Service Design Tools (observations, interviews, service encounter analysis, blueprint creation etc.) students will assess the client’s working environment and devise innovative development ideas on how to adapt the “healing way of working” to that particular client organization.

Students will work in groups and present their findings in the form of a research report and a poster. The main results of the groups will be presented to a panel made up of client representative/s and IFMP lecturers. This application of Service Design Tools to a patient’s “service” process in the context of a hospital or other healthcare environment is a method which, to the best of the IFMP partner Universities’ knowledge, has not yet been widely tested.

It is interesting to observe the outcomes of these projects implemented by the international student groups. According to various research outcomes, there is evidence that the use of Service Design Tools can affect both the customer’s and the service provider’s behavior and actions in the context of achieving their desired goals. The results may also help service providers in hospital environments to plan the delivery of services in a more end-user-friendly way.

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