

Mini Review

Facility Management and Biophilic Design: Connecting Human Being with Nature

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Introduction

Today no one doubts the need to “take care” of people, and not only from the perspective of disease prevention, but of the promotion of health (defined by the World Health Organization as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not only the absence of diseases or illnesses” -2013-).

We also do not hesitate to take care of our planet, respecting the natural environment that surrounds us. Ecological or sustainable construction (Green Building Movement) guides us in the practice of creating structures and using processes that are environmentally responsible and that save resources throughout the life cycle of a building.

If we connect both needs, the great challenge is to design physical spaces that promote well-being for people and planet (see figure 1):



Figure 1. 4Ps: People, Planet, Profit & Place.

And how can we create attractive, sustainable and healthy physical spaces? The Biophilic Design can be part of the answer.

The psychologist Erich Fromm was the one who coined the term “Biophilia” in 1964, defining it as the “love for life”. Although the biologist Edward Wilson popularized this concept in 1984. According to Wilson, “human feel an innate affinity for all living elements.” This is something more common than we think.

Due to the growing urban development, this biological concept was transferred to the design of spaces. Since we have been immersing ourselves in environments that are increasingly edified, asphalted and digitized, we need to find the opportunity to surround ourselves again by nature in which, originally, we have evolved.

Although it may seem relatively new, this intrinsic tendency to connect with nature through spaces has been reflected in numerous artistic and architectural expressions since ancient times. For example, let’s analyze how the gardens of the Alhambra constantly recreate and incorporate natural elements in its architecture and design (running water, vegetation, natural light, use of “natural” materials such as stone, wood ...).

How could we, therefore, define the BIOPHILIC DESIGN? We could define it as the “evocation of nature through the incorporation of elements in urban or interior spaces with the main objective of helping people feel better and reconnect with space.” The International Well Building Institute has evaluated the biophilic design as one of the variables to be taken into account in order to achieve the WELL® certification (the first building certification focused on the health and well-being of the users). This variable, together with others, allows obtaining the WELL GOLD® or WELL PLATINUM® certificates.

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Now, what do we mean by “natural elements”? We can fall into the error of believing that a biophilic design basically consists of the incorporation of plants in the interior. The concept is much broader and covers numerous options. Aspects of nature such as sunlight, water, air or animals can also be part of the design. More developed models such as William Browning and Jennifer Seal-Cramer (2014) point out the possibility of indirectly recreating natural environments through textures, colors or shapes that simulate them. The human being attraction for mystery places and its need for exploration, can also be resolved through these designs.

Therefore, there is a wide range of possibilities. It has been shown that the combination of different elements enhances the effects they have on people. But we should not think that it is something difficult to achieve. In many cases, simple changes or adjustments can have a great impact. For example, changing the orientation of a desk to optimally take advantage of sunlight, can be a simple measure that provides energy and better mood to the user. Likewise, although the greatest benefits are achieved with direct exposure to “living” elements, we must not forget the possibility of using synthetic or reprographic materials for their recreation. A large number of researches in hospital settings found that showing patients pictures of pleasant landscapes immediately before or after surgery resulted in lower levels of stress and better recovery rates.

So, what impact does biophilic design have on people? The benefits are multiple and affect the cognitive, physiological and emotional dimensions of the human being. In a generic way, we could say that our body reacts positively, activating our parasympathetic nervous system (decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, etc.); Our emotions are also positive, feeling a higher self-esteem, vitality, motivation, comfort and health sensation, etc. And also, our brain performs better, with greater concentration and creativity (which achieves an increase in productivity).

The benefits are clear. However, each case will require a prior study of the needs and expectations of users and the surrounding environment in order to design “ad hoc” measures that can take full advantage of existing resources.



Figure 2 : Hospital Khoo Teck Puat. “Stephen R. Keller First Prize of Biophilic Design” (Nov, 2017).



Figure 3 : Observatory Restaurant. Madrid (2017)

Note

From the Research Commission of IFMA Spain, in the Working Group on WORKPLACE we are preparing a guide that presents the guidelines to be followed to equip a new office, from the search of the most appropriate property to the services that must be managed. The guide will develop and take into account important aspects such as “Biophilia”.