

Understanding How to Increase Restorativeness of Interiors: A Qualitative Exploratory Study on Attention Restoration Theory in Relation to Interior Design

Authors : Hande Burcu Deniz

Abstract : People in the U.S. spend a considerable portion of their time indoors. This makes it crucial to provide environments that support the well-being of people. Restorative environments aim to help people recover their cognitive resources that were spent due to intensive use of directed attention. Spending time in nature and taking a nap are two of the best ways to restore these resources. However, they are not possible to do most of the time. The problem is that many studies have revealed how nature and spending time in natural contexts can help boost restoration, but there are fewer studies conducted to understand how cognitive resources can be restored in interior settings. This study aims to explore the answer to this question: which qualities of interiors increase the restorativeness of an interior setting and how do they mediate restorativeness of an interior. To do this, a phenomenological qualitative study was conducted. The study was interested in the definition of attention restoration and the experiences of the phenomena. As the themes emerged, they were analyzed to match with Attention Restoration Theory components (being away, extent, fascination, compatibility) to examine how interior design elements mediate the restorativeness of an interior. The data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with international residents of Minnesota. The interviewees represent young professionals who work in Minnesota and often experience mental fatigue. Also, they have less emotional connections with places in Minnesota, which enabled data to be based on the physical qualities of a space rather than emotional connections. In the interviews, participants were asked about where they prefer to be when they experience mental fatigue. Next, they were asked to describe the physical qualities of the places they prefer to be with reasons. Four themes were derived from the analysis of interviews. The themes are in order according to their frequency. The first, and most common, the theme was "connection to outside". The analysis showed that people need to be either physically or visually connected to recover from mental fatigue. Direct connection to nature was reported as preferable, whereas urban settings were the secondary preference along with interiors. The second theme emerged from the analysis was "the presence of the artwork," which was experienced differently by the interviewees. The third theme was "amenities". Interviews pointed out that people prefer to have the amenities that support desired activity during recovery from mental fatigue. The last theme was "aesthetics." Interviewees stated that they prefer places that are pleasing to their eyes. Additionally, they could not get rid of the feeling of being worn out in places that are not well-designed. When we matched the themes with the four art components (being away, extent, fascination, compatibility), some of the interior qualities showed overlapping since they were experienced differently by the interviewees. In conclusion, this study showed that interior settings have restorative potential, and they are multidimensional in their experience.

Keywords : attention restoration, fatigue, interior design, qualitative study, restorative environments

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