

Abstract for Intersectional reflections on wellbeing and healthcare spaces, FASS Health Hub at Lancaster University

Topic: “Spaces, architectures, and environments of health and healthcare”

Research Title:

Spaces of Birth: multidisciplinary perspectives on what matters in the design of NHS birth settings

Abstract (300 words):

Exploring the architectures and environments of birth in NHS healthcare, this paper reveals themes from an interdisciplinary workshop ‘Spaces of Birth’ held in London in June 2023. Birth is potentially a transformative and/or traumatic experience for everyone present, from the birthing person to the obstetrician. Whether the birthing person feels they have agency impacts their experience, and the design and layout of birthing spaces plays a role in their capacity to exercise autonomy. Although NHS hospitals and birth centres are the theatre in which the journey of most UK births play out, the complexity of healthcare spaces and the connection between physical design, clinical practices and patient experiences are not well examined.

This paper reports findings recorded at a 12-person workshop – architects, philosophers, doctors, midwives and ethicists – discussing the relationship between birth experiences spatial order from everyone’s discipline-specific perspective. A thematic analysis of data (photos, videos, transcripts, field notes and observations) was conducted using a grounded theory perspective. The themes which emerged included but are not limited to the objects present and their materiality (e.g. equipment, bed, clock); screening and privacy; the stimulation and overstimulation of senses through lighting, sound, and textures; the overlap of institutional and architectural structures; spatial ordering and how it impacts autonomy, adaptability and agency; as well as how architecture mediates conflict and connection.

The findings will guide future research for the Wellcome-funded overall project: ‘Spaces of Birth and Death’. This is a collaboration between architects, philosophers and medical practitioners, intended to develop a theoretical framework for understanding how key human values (like autonomy, freedom of association, and well-being) are distinctively promoted or hindered by the spaces in which we are born and die. The aims are evaluation of existing architectural arrangements’ in NHS settings; policy tools to guide design; and design of low-cost spatial interventions.

Biography (50 words):

Dr Jane Clossick is Senior Lecturer in Architecture at London Metropolitan University. Her research interests include the architecture of healthcare and participatory design processes. Cinar Aydogan is a PhD candidate at London Met. His thesis entitled “Moments of Disclosure” explores social media’s impact on ‘coming out’ online for transgender people.