

Alternative Forms of Healthcare Facilities

*Meditation Centre
on Mount Olympus,
Greece*

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*keywords
healthcare facilities
meditation
wellness
environmental
light-structure pavilionsin*

Introduction

This is a project that proceeded from a thesis proposal in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. The team consisted of two students from Aristotle University, Ms Christina Foka, Mr NasosZempiloglou, Mr Chrysafidis as the supervisor, and Ms Maria Kanetsou and Mr Kallikratis Evlogimenos as external associates. The project concerns the design of meditation centre on Mount Olympus in Greece.

The main aim for the project, as set by the design team, was to submit a proposal satisfying not only functional and aesthetic parameters, but also environmental and sustainable requirements, in the form of light-structure pavilionsin harmony with nature.

There was a particular interest on the benefits of meditation for both mental and physical health. In contradiction to Descartes writings about the autonomous nature of body and soul, which shaped human perception for centuries, the recent comprehension of the interrelation between the two, and the understating of wellness from a holistic perspective, led to our decision to study the potential of such facilities in natural environments. In the theoretical level, the main axis that determined both the programme and the design of the proposal are the practises of mediation and the theory of Chakras, on the one hand, and theories related to geomagnetic fields, on the other.

Meditation relates to practicing of such techniques as mindfulness, relaxing, concentrating, controlling breath - in order to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm state. As it has been proved, meditation suppresses the function of Amygdala, a part of the brain related to the processing of memory, decision-making, and emotions like fear, anxiety, and aggression. There are several related studies focusing on the plasticity of brain and the effects of meditation to the brain.

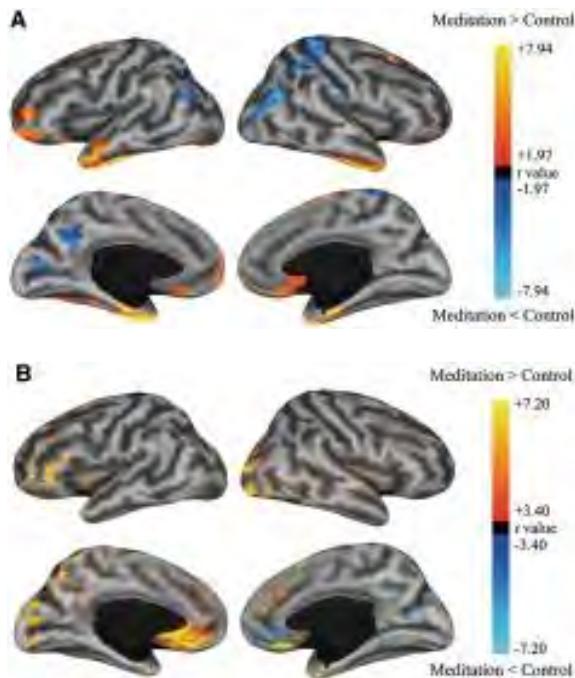


fig01 - Regional maps showing the statistical differences (A) in cortical thickness and (B) in FA between meditation practitioners and control subjects. (Kwon J. S., et al., 2012).

Scans MR images showed that the brain's gray matter density increases for people who meditate, as well as that the areas of brain with minimum or low activity are larger with frequent meditation.

The benefits of meditation for health and wellness are numerous. Indicatively we could mention that it reduces Stress and Anxiety, improves Emotional Health, it may reduce Age-Related Memory Loss, generates positive feelings, may help in fighting addictions and depression, improves sleep, helps control pain, decreases blood pressure and heart rate e.t.c. "Mens sana in corpore sano", as Juvenal has stated (cited in Young, 2005).

The second axis of this project is the theory of chakra, found in the traditions of Hinduism, and concerns to the various focal points in the body, used in meditation practises in India. These theories served as an inspiration for the design of the proposed pavilions, on a conceptual level.

The third axis that guided the development of this project are theories related to geomagnetic fields. Hartmann grid refers to the grid of lines of positive and negative energy or radiation stemming from the ground that affects our mental state and functions, on both conscious and subconscious level. Ley lines, on the other hand, refer to the alignment of religious monuments and sacred places of ancient civilizations, which, according to theories, are located at the spots where Hartmann's lines intersect.



fig02 - Mount Olympus and the proposed meditation journey.

The research conducted indicated that Mount Olympus (Picture 2) has several similar spots and it is a place where the geomagnetic field appears to be very strong. We regarded these locations as an optimum choice for a meditation centre, as peaceful retreats in a natural environment, where someone could repose, concentrate and heal oneself. It is worth noting, at this point, that in ancient Greece, Asclepeions were healing temples of Asclepius, God of Medicine. These were sacred places that patients would visit in order to receive treatment or healing, either spiritual or physical. A study of Mount Olympus in terms of geological features, morphology of the terrain, climate, flora and so on, revealed key

characteristics of the highest mountain in Greece, that proved to be useful as trying to select the site for the proposed retreat. With 2918 meters height, Olympus is characterized by the difficult terrain, the steep slopes and the extended ridges. The temperatures range from 10 to -5 degrees Celsius at higher altitudes. Moreover, there are 1700 different species of plants, forming four different zones of vegetation (from evergreen plants, to coniferous and low vegetation at higher altitudes, which consist the 25% of flora in Greece. This study assisted us in the site selection process, minimizing available locations and sites in an initial level, prior to the several site visits that were involved in the process.

More specifically, we identified numerous existing hiking routes and shelters spots in Mount Olympus, which were regarded as a valuable opportunity for the purpose of our proposal.

We decided to utilize this grid and the existing facilities and shelters along the routes, as the terrain and altitude poses significant difficulties in transferring construction materials, as well as in the construction process in general.

Consequently, we specified the most appropriate route along which we set the locations for the pavilions (Picture 2). In essence, we propose a journey, in a natural environment, intact from significant manmade interventions.

This journey connects the pavilions, which serve as the meditation spots along the route. From the study, conducted by the research team, about Chakras theory and history, we concluded designing 7 pavilions, one for each Chakras. Chakras were further analysed in terms of the sense and basic element they are related to, the mental functions they affect, personality characteristics that they may shape, etc. Subsequently we tried to interpret each chakra to geometry and form based on the analysis and chakras' symbols (Picture 3), setting, as well, design parameters for each of the seven pavilions, such as the numbers of simultaneous users, size in square meters, materials, relation to the ground, activities to take place in each pavilion etc.



fig03 - Concept diagram.

Pavilion A. The Core

Chakra name: Muladhara

The first pavilion is intended to be used by up to two people simultaneously. It is closely associated to earth, the basic shape that was assigned to it is the circle, and relates to the sense of smell. The wooden dome structure, with a rock in the centre, is encircled by a garden of local, wild aromatic plants and herbs, in order to stimulate the sense of smell.



Pavilion B. The Vein

Chakra name: Svadhithana

The second pavilion is also intended to be used by up to two people simultaneously.

It associates with the element of water, and the shape we associated it with is the square. It relates to the sense of taste, and the small vein-like stream that crosses the space, fills the small pond where visitors can quench their thirst and taste the pure and icy water of the local spring.

Pavillon B



Pavilion C. The fireplace

Chakra name: Manipura

The third pavilion may shelter up to four people simultaneously.

It is related to the element of fire, it is associated with the spiral shape. We correlated this pavilion with the sense of sight, and the concept is the spiral route leading to the central fireplace, resembling the central fireplace of ancient dwellings.

Pavillon C



Pavilion D. The Cresset

Chakra name: Anahata

The fourth pavilion, which is the biggest one, is intended to be used by up to six people simultaneously.

It is associated with the element of air and the shape of hexagon.

The sense that is related to is touch. It is a wooden structure lifted from the ground and inspired by Japanese lanterns.

Pavillon D



Pavillon E



Pavilion E. The Well

Chakra name: Vissdha

The fifth pavilion can shelter one person. It is related to the sense of hearing and sound, and the basic shape associated with it is the triangle. As the intention is to minimize stimuli of other senses, and someone to be able to concentrate to the sounds (or the silence) of nature, this pavilion is actually a well, accessed from below. It is a place of isolation, located in a crevice in the side of a cliff.

Pavillon F



Pavilion F. The Cantilever

Chakra name: Ajna

The sixth pavilion is intended to shelter up to four people. It is related to mind and thinking, and the basic shape is the trapezoid. The pavilion is a cantilever on a sheer cliff, where one could stare the dramatic scenery with the mountain tops in the horizon and the canyon below.

Pavillon G



Pavilion G. The Pyramid

Chakra name: Sahasrara

The seventh and final pavilion, may shelter one person. It is associated to light and consciousness. The basic shape is the rhombus, and the concept is a rotating hourglass, emphasizing on the interchange of light and shadows, as well as the isolation and opening of views as the sand falls down.



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As it becomes clear, the proposal is characterized by light, small structures, as subtle intervention in a natural environment that create a dialogue with the surrounding nature.

To that end, the materials we choose are natural (wood, rope, fabric, stone) extensively abundant in the area, or, at least, easily transported, in order, not only to harmonize the constructions to and blend them with the environment, but more importantly as a result of the sense of sustainable responsibility that we share as team of architects and designers. Similarly, the choice to use the existing grid of paths and routes, as well as the existing

shelters found in the area, aimed also at minimizing the impact on the environment, both in terms of the extent of the actual manmade interventions in a natural environment, and the adverse effects of producing materials and transporting them on site.

This meditation centre, designed as a journey in a natural environment of great beauty, which is covered with millennia of legends and myths, continuous the basic concept and logic behind the ancient Asclepeions. Where one could retreat to concentrate-meditate and heal, reconnecting one's self with the natural world.

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