

Fundamental philosophy of Snoezelen – historical background, planning and concept

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The term

The term “Snoezelen” is a combination of the words “snuffeln = to sniff, to snuffle and “doezelen” = to doze, to snooze.

If someone in Holland asks what Snoezelen is all about then the answer would often be “The way the word sounds speaks for itself.” With not so many words, Snoezelen is a relaxing, recreative leisure time activity for the severely disabled. Since it originated in the middle of the seventies it has been picked up, trialled and developed further with huge enthusiasm. Meanwhile “Snoezelen” has become a well-known term in Holland and many other countries.

The term “Snoezelen” represents an opportunity for activity especially for the severely mentally disabled. Contingent on positive experiences, most of all in Holland, the country of origin, Snoezelen has been acknowledged as a recognised activity and a form of therapy for disabled people. In a casual atmosphere various stimuli are offered, which address the senses, -touch, smell, seeing and listening – a new opportunity, for the mentally disabled to discover the world and their own body and thereby to make new positive experiences.

The calm island atmosphere gives a disabled person the time, to occupy elaborately with the different body perceptions, something that is impossible in everyday life. Therefore the effects can be absorbed in peace. Snoezelen contributes to a large extend to the enhancement and further development of the world of experiences for severely disabled people.



The development of Snoezelen

Reason

CLELAND and CLARK (1966) from the USA were the first to come up with the idea to create a “sensory cafeteria”. That means a room in which mentally disabled people could have the chance to experience the different senses. Snoezelen can be compared to that early approach. But since I don’t know how far this information from America has affected the Dutch development, I will just talk about Snoezelen

development in the Netherlands.

In the middle of the seventies the Dutch institutions for the mentally disabled were also confronted by the growing problems with the severely disabled. As VERHEUL states, most of all there was a lack of activities which were suitable for the needs of that group, since the occupational and leisure time activities which could be used by the less severely mentally disabled people – at least in a modified form – weren't of any interest to the severely disabled.

From the different efforts to create new playing material or activities for that group, it was developed on one side the "adjusted material" that means playing material which shape, size and function tried to do justice to that group of the disabled and on the other side there was "Snoezelen".

There are inter-relations between these two activities since Snoezelen does express a different view towards the occupational and leisure time activities of severely disabled people, which are also obvious in offer and function of the playing materials. It is used less as learning material but more with the aim to let disabled people enjoy it and with the conviction, that they will learn enough by doing so. On the other hand due to the development of so called Snoezelen objects, that means things that are offered in Snoezelen, the pool of playing materials for the living and life situations of severely disabled people was very much enriched.

The development of Snoezelen in the Netherlands

The beginnings of Snoezelen are closely linked to the expansion of occupational activities for people with severe multiple disabilities in the middle of the seventies, starting in the Netherlands. That is to say that for that target group there were no recreational activities on offer at all. To get an impression about the accommodation of people with severe disabilities, I will describe life in the Centre De Hartenberg.

Since 1968 there have been approximately 440 mentally disabled residents in the institution. Their care was focused exclusively on their accommodation. Approximately 70% of the residents could be described as severe multiple disabled, this means, that there was only a small group of people active enough to go to work at the daily activity centre. In the workshop they produced simple articles. The residents with severe multiple disabilities stayed behind in their flats or the pavilion. There was always a reason why they couldn't leave the building: One day it would be too warm outside or too cold or it would be too wet or too damp. Apart from making the journey to the necessary therapies or to a doctor, there was no reason to leave the house. The people with severe multiple disabilities were protected like porcelain dolls, a frail material that would become ill once it was exposed to the outside. The living accommodation of these people was linked to a hospital that followed tight medical guidelines. The living conditions of these disabled people were very sterile and cold and the wards reminded you of a hospital with beds and oxygen bottles right next to them – everything was absolutely spotless. It was anything but a cosy environment, no atmosphere to feel good and sojourn for long. The doctors and senior nurses determined the routine, one talked about "nurses" not "companion".

In the early seventies under these quite afflicting circumstances grew the idea of offering occupational activities to severely multiple disabled, called "Bezigheidsbegeleiding". Initially that focused only on the living accommodation, since it wasn't possible to move the residents to a different building. The members of staff, so called "Bezigheidsbegeleider", meaning occupational therapists, worked in close proximity to the living quarters of the severely multiple disabled, developing materials and concepts, to trigger interest and to activate: They made mobiles, musical objects, used bubbles and massaged with coloured sheets. Natural materials were also used to make touch objects etc. Even the nurses were impressed by the use of these materials in the living quarters and incorporated the plans to make further objects. We are talking about the very first objects used for Snoezelen, it was all very simple and not expensive. Jan Hulsegge as music therapist and Ad Verheul as occupational therapist were responsible for the very first leisure time activities for severely multiple disabled people in the Centre De Hartenberg.

At that time Ad Verheul and Jan Hulsegge came across an article by American psychologists Cleland and Clark. By 1966 they had already reported in their findings about the possibilities of development promotion, improved communication and behaviour changes achieved by selected sensory offers to development-delayed, hyperactive, mentally disabled and autistic people. These target groups should

receive motivation to see, hear, smell and feel and for the stimulation of the kinaesthesia in accordingly designed rooms. At that time the two authors had already insisted, that a so-called "Sensory Cafeteria" should be the most logical first step to stimulate and guide the sensory process.

The idea of "primary activation" was developed further by the two Dutch experts, because it was recognised, that not only people with a higher mental level but all disabled people were in need of such a specific offers.

A big force was the parent's interest, because they discovered all of a sudden new opportunities for their children. Passive education was turned into activity, to initiate contact again, to communicate with a disabled child and to activate the process. In the Centre De Hartenberg the concept Snoezelen was still unknown. Only through the link with another institution Haarendael, where at the same time similar activities were tested, the name was made public.

First approaches in different institutions

Since, like already mentioned, the search for new activities for the severely disabled was the problem for many institutions, different approaches of Snoezelen were developed in various institutions at the same time. Their experiences were only exchanged some time later.

A first project and at the same time the name Snoezelen was developed in 1974 in the "Haarendael" institution in the relaxation service with the thought that the physical effort was not the goal but the possibilities of experiences and the relaxation. The aim was to let the disabled person experience well being, by trying to create a situation in which they could get to one or the other activity but could also enjoy it passively.

These goals should be achieved via the sensual perception. In the so-called relaxation service of the institution two civil servants *Niels Snoek* and *Klaas Schenk* and a staff member *Rein Staps* organised the first project in the assembly hall. With the help of light, music, smells and objects a dream atmosphere was created in which stimuli for every sense could be found, for example:

- Visual stimuli darkened rooms, orbiting pictures, mirrors
- Auditory stimuli calm music
- Tactile stimuli Ball pond, hay, hammock
- Scented stimuli incense, 4711 scented water
- Taste stimuli different tasting food

Since there was only little money available, creative initiative was needed. The project was very successful but after expiration of the civil servants service, the project had to be stopped for the time being due to lack of time and personnel.

Later the institution "Piusoord" picked the idea up again and improved it even more. The institution introduced "Snoezelen" under its name on an NGBZ conference in March 1979 (NGBZ=Nederlands Genootschap ter Bestudering van de Zwakzinnigheid en de Zwakzinnigenzorg) themed PLAY and they invited the entire personnel to take part.

There the staff of De Hartenberg learned of the name and realised, that they were working on the same ideas. Since there was obviously a demand for activities for the severely disabled, also seen at the annual summer fairs of the institution where a varied program was on offer without being able to consider the needs of the disabled, the idea was born to create, with the help of primary sense stimuli, a world in which severely disabled people could feel good.

The idea was put into action for the very first time at the De Hartenbergs summer fair in 1978. An experimental sensory tent offering multi sensory experiences was put up. It was only at that conference that one became aware of the other institutions efforts, received further information and took over the term "Snoezelen".

In August 1979 in the course of the next summer fair another 10 day Snoezelen project followed for which many of the objects were handmade.

Because of the big success, that means most of all the positive effect it had on the severely disabled who used the offer, mostly fortnightly projects were organised in the following years on a regular basis

until February 1984 when Snoezelen could be offered on a permanent basis in it's own rooms.

Due to the "open days", reports about different projects and an intensive exchange of information, Snoezelen quickly became well known in other institutions. Today we can assume that not only the institutions for mentally disabled people but also the ones for the psychologically ill and from senile dementia suffering people know the term and partly use it in any form in their work. It is also safe to assume that Snoezelen is mentioned in the training of the group leaders.

The activities tent

In 1978 we received a letter from a colleague who then worked at the centre for the mentally handicapped "Piusoord" in Tilburg. He was very enthusiastic about all the positive response they had had to an "activities tent". The activities were meant for the lower-level residents, and they made use of sound, lights, balloons, hay, etc. Because there was going to be a summer fair at De Hartenberg it seemed a nice thing to organize a similar facility for the lower-level residents there. To be honest we must confess that we were not very enthusiastic at first. We began working it out with some of our colleagues. Since it was to be only a temporary affair we were given a kind of shed to use, or rather, a roof on poles. We turned it into a Snoezelen room by screening off the sides with sail cloth and created corridors with agricultural plastic. In this "maze" we located a series of activities.

These were separated visually but not audibly, which was sometimes disturbing. Some of the activities were:

- a room with a blower that blew shreds of paper and balloons through the room;
- a corner with soft cushions and hay in which squeaky toys were hidden.
- There was also a room with an overhead projector on which a bowl of water was placed. By dripping ink into the water fabulous colour patterns were created on a white screen. On the platform of a record player we had placed a jam jar with pieces of coloured paper stuck on it. Behind it we had placed a lamp. The jam jar worked as a lens and while it turned, colourful beams were projected on the screen.
- One corridor was the sound department. All kinds of sounds could be heard from speakers or headphones.
- There was a rack with several musical instruments mounted on it which looked very attractive.
- There was also a "smells" department: a table on which a selection of fragrant objects was placed, like scent bottles, soap, herbs, etc.
- We also hung tactile objects from the ceiling: a woollen curtain and squeaky toys.
- There was a water and sand tray, a papier-mâché table and a foam tray.
- There were trays with foods that tasted either salty, sweet, sour or bitter.
- At the end of the maze there was a large tray partly filled with gravel, another part with sand, etc., so you could experience different sound and walking sensations.

After a few days it became clear to us that we could put aside any doubts we might have had, as there were so many positive verbal and even more non-verbal reactions. It was a tremendous success. Encouraged by this we and a few colleagues got round the table to discuss the future developments.

At the summer fair one year later we were given the use of a number of rooms in the day-care department. We got permission to fit up these fairly large rooms as temporary Snoezelen rooms. They were properly partitioned off so there were no irritating visual or aural stimuli from the other rooms. What's more, the rooms were very spacious so the activities came out much better than they did the first time. It was also possible now to create a transition area at the entrance between the daylight outdoors and the twilight inside.

During these summer fairs we kept open house. In the second year of the Snoezelen activities we had more than four hundred visitors in two days, most of whom were colleagues from all over the country. Since that time both the internal and the external development of Snoezelen has seen a rapid growth. In 1979 and 1980 two reports were produced about our experiences with Snoezelen. These primarily discussed the experiences of residents, parents and staff. They also included a list of the materials that were used. These reports were read by several people all over the country. We had many invitations from colleagues to come and see their permanent and semi permanent Snoezelen experiments. We exchanged lots of information and new ideas were born and tried out. Articles were published in various magazines and there were lectures. In short everybody was interested in this phenomenon.

Although many institutions in the country already had permanent Snoezelen rooms, we did not. From our own experiences and suggestions from outside we had formed a picture of what a permanent facility should look like. We wanted to fit it up with all the equipment that we thought was necessary. So we needed permanent quarters and we had to find the funds. In the planning stage we were confronted with the severity of the fire safety requirements in this field. We just had to meet these, which had its financial consequences, of course. In February 1984 the job was done, our permanent Snoezelen room was finished. There were certain limitations: some of the rooms should have been a little bigger, some of the materials used had to be changed to such extent to meet the safety requirements that their educational value decreased. And of course there were some teething troubles to overcome. If you should think that we have found a definitive solution we have to disappoint you. We are always looking for improvements and new ideas. The latest developments in electronics, for instance, will have to be watched closely, though they should never come first. We should never think we know everything about the severely retarded and his experiences with Snoezelen.

Theory of Snoezelen

The aims of Snoezelen are closely linked to the problems and possibilities of the target group.

Here are some possible definitions:

- "Snoezelen " is a selective offer of primary stimuli in an attractive setting.
- „Snoezelen means a specially designed environment where well-being is to be caused by controllable multi sensorial stimuli.“
- "Snoezelen " offers the opportunity to function in other ways. Particularly their being active, tasting, smelling, touching and moving because they like it, not to acquire information or to learn from it or develop, suits the needs and possibilities of the severely retarded much better. "
- "Snoezelen " is a primary activation of severely mentally handicapped people, especially aimed at sensory perception and experience, by means of light sound, touch, smell and taste.
- "Snoezelen" is creating authentic experiences for those who are different.

Target group

For the severely disabled who can visit the daily activities centre, Snoezelen is special leisure time activity. That gives them the chance to "go out" for once, which means to go into different rooms and to experience all together different things.

One does assume that that particular group of disabled people does depend on their primary senses with the appropriate feelings and movements to experience their environment but that they are not capable of experiencing them properly or work through them in their every day life.

In one of the institution's report the opinion is represented that for these (severely) disabled people the world must seem like a "chaos" in which everything seems to be complicated and puzzling and that they

are incapable of influencing these stimuli, to get them in order and to understand them in such a way that we would judge as normal. Because of that every day life might feel threatening and scary for these people since they cannot really do anything about it to avert against all these things, which are literally "coming over" them.

Definition, Aims, Principles

Snoezelen is a leisure time activity for the severely disabled, where they can relax and find themselves. To do that a situation is necessary for which in contrast to every day life the senses are not addressed simultaneously but where they have to concentrate on individual sensory perceptions for example to touch only. The senses shouldn't be addressed in width but in depth. To achieve that, we try to offer stimuli in a selected way and reduce unnecessary stimuli at the same time. The offer of stimuli should be chosen in such a way to make nice and pleasurable sensory perceptions possible for a disabled person as well as to offer special experiences that can't be made in every day life. One should feel good and safe.

It applies the principle to give the disabled the necessary space and time, to choose for himself or indicate which stimuli he enjoys, what he wants to concentrate on for longer or what he wants to do. The encouragement of the residents shouldn't come from staff but from the things in the room: material and environment should be inviting and stimulating to activate the disabled person to for example reach for something or lie on a soft mat etc. At the same time the environment should bring the necessary peace and quiet to make relaxation possible because experiencing the direct environment, taking it all in and passively enjoying it are already enough aims.

The intention, Snoezelen should serve the residents relaxation, is of big importance to the De Hartenberg as opposed to other Dutch institutions. To understand that, one has to realise how much pressure and tension the disabled in the housing group are under. We understand "relaxation" mostly as counterpart to "tension", with which we associate work and physical and mental activity, which we, after a first glance, wouldn't necessarily expect in the daily routine of a severely disabled person.

In conversation it was established that the constant presence of the many other residents with their peculiarities and possibly disturbing behaviour (screaming, lashing out etc.), space restrictions as well as the high expectations of the environment, which they can't understand, can to a high degree cause them tension and stress.

Van Gennep (1982) does point out, that too big groups in to small living space can cause behavioural problems like aggression, hyperactivity, stereotypes etc.

Snoezelen with its dream atmosphere is meant to be a place where one can leave everything behind and find complete relaxation.

Accordingly calm music and dimmed lights should help to create a special atmosphere. Other institutions state besides or instead of our aim of rest and relaxation the stimulation of the development or therapeutic intentions for example consciously to use Snoezelen to make worried clients well balanced again.

Another principle in Snoezelen is

"niets moet, alles mag"
which means, "nothing has to be done, everything is allowed"

Unlike in the housing group where certain restrained ways or activities are demanded from the disabled (to clean, to eat, not to run away, etc), during Snoezelen he should be allowed to be himself and to do whatever he likes. The accompanying members of staff should therefore distance themselves from their own ideas and expectations and let the clients have their own way, even more so than ever. Free use of Snoezelen material is permitted. If for example someone does not want to smell a smelling device but would like to rotate its stand that would be accepted. The voluntary intention of the offer is particularly important. It is not about a collection of material experienced according to course but about a varied and atmospheric offer of sensual impressions that should be used voluntarily and gladly. Who does not like it after a settling in period does not have to take further part in Snoezelen.

Company

The residents usually do not go to Snoezelen alone, but are accompanied by a member of staff. For most of the severely disabled that is necessary due to their immobility. Often they cannot move towards something on their own or cannot get away from unwanted stimuli. Also in the beginning they might be scared of the strange room and the objects, which could be limited if a trusted person is around. Beside the few institutions where employees of the accompanying service stand by the residents, group leaders of the housing groups also full fill the task.

There is no question among the institutions about the necessity of company. But what importance it has, how the accompanying person has to behave during Snoezelen, varies among the institutions. In Pinsoord for example they are trying to achieve the aim of relaxation whereby the group leader does accompany the resident into the room indeed and place them in such a way that they are able to use the materials on offer. Then they leave the Snoezelen environment and observe the resident through a one way mirror. They will only interfere if help is needed.

In contrast to that distant observing method, experiencing Snoezelen together is very important to the De Hartenberg. Snoezelen is actually seen as a good way to build and maintain an intense contact between client and carer. Through that even Snoezelen itself experiences an enrichment and intensification.

Of course the carer shouldn't get involved too much or let their own interest stand in the way of experiencing the atmosphere and the objects. To do that it is very important that the carer can put his own standards and ideas in the background, to give the clients as much freedom as possible to try out and explore. They should not for example show them how to move the waterbed and how to be moved on it but let the disabled person himself experience it.

It requires good observation to recognise clients' wishes and needs and to act on that for example by adjusting stimuli individually (switch on/off certain devices), changing the place or room or returning to the group.

Here one is reminded once again of the principle of own choice and speed that for most of the severely disabled can only be achieved with the help of open-minded carers.

How far such an individual company makes help and experiencing Snoezelen together possible does depend on the relationship between carer and resident, which on the other hand has to comply with the degree of disability. If one aims at physical contact and constant attention, when care and supervision are needed, a relation of 1 to 1 is necessary. For clients who can move themselves, can approach things and keep themselves occupied with an object for a longer period of time, Snoezelen is also possible for groups of up to six clients.

In De Hartenberg it depends less on the objectively reserved observation but on company for the purpose of an emphasising contact in the respective Snoezelen situation and the influence that such consciously together experienced Snoezelen situation can have on the relationship between carers and residents.

Instruction of the staff

A good company of the disabled person by the group leaders, in the sense that the employees know what is important, which principles and rules they must follow and which possibilities in the Snoezelen rooms are generally offered, does depend on a good training. With often high fluctuation of group leaders and temporary work of trainees, the necessary continuity of success in Snoezelen can only be achieved if excellent training and education can be provided.

Technical Instructions

Members of staff have to know how to use different apparatus to get all the possible effects that are produced by different devices (for example Slide-, Film-, Liquid projectors, Sound systems, Lights, Fans). Only when all the technical details are known and used by the staff accordingly then the specific dosage of stimuli, that takes into consideration the wishes and needs of the disabled person, can be guaranteed. It does depend on the staff's knowledge about the use of the devices whether existing offers are generally recognised and used.

To learn Snoezelen

Disabled and non-disabled people practice Snoezelen in different ways due to their different abilities and needs.

After my experiences non-disabled people have big difficulties getting involved in Snoezelen. To take the shoes off alone is hard work (feet could smell unpleasantly). To simply lie in the ball pond or on a waterbed, to perceive ones feelings, to accept them and enjoy them, is often difficult and feels unsafe and embarrassing. One feels especially embarrassed should someone be present and watch. Experiences and sensations like for example feeling safe on a lightly swinging waterbed, to snuggle up in a warm fur or to dive into a ball pond and to feel comfortable and surrounded, we barely admit to as adults in our every day life. To get involved in it requires overcoming inhibitions and fears, which severely disabled people cannot do.

Non-disabled people often tend to recognise their environment very quickly visually. They "forget" the other senses and must be trained again to consciously touch, smell, listen and taste again. They have a tendency to question everything and to rationalise. To be calm, to relax, to perceive sensations and to enjoy them doesn't usually last very long. The urge to be active stands in the way. They prefer things they can play with or experiment (technical).

To provide Snoezelen in a sense of the aims and principles as mentioned above, it is necessary for the staff to experience the stimuli and range of experiences in the Snoezelen rooms and learn to handle them. That will prepare them better for the Snoezelen experience they will have together with the disabled person.

However, in practice it is often found that new employees of the institution take disabled people to the Snoezelen rooms on their very first visit and get the instruction on site from other present group leaders or they will simply work things out together with the disabled person as far as it is possible. The time for them to experience for themselves is often missing.

Types of Snoezelen

The Snoezelen definition is a vast one and does allow many possibilities of application.

Snoezelen in Nature

The most obvious would be Snoezelen in Nature, which means, one does concentrate very consciously on sensory perceptions available in nature.

Snoezelen does support the recollection of experiences, how they can be consciously experienced for example during a particular walk through the woods, which addresses all our senses and leads to rest and relaxation. In the woods one can hear the rustling of the trees and birds singing, one can smell the flowers, leaves and wet grass, one can feel bark and moss and amongst other things one can see greens and browns in constantly changing sunlight.

Similar things apply to the coast area with all the sand, wind and water. Employees of the institution did realise, that while dealing with severely disabled people all these things could be explored again to be able to offer them most authentic experiences.

For example, one should simply take the client for a walk in the rain or snow instead of standing him under the shower and one should let them experience nature's own materials like earth, sand, grass or straw in the natural habitat instead of sprinkling rice or packaging materials all over them.

We only realised the importance of these natural experiences during our work with the severely disabled after successfully using the artificially prepared sensory objects, partly also because we do not see the disabled person as "ill" anymore and has to be kept away from harmful influences such as wind and weather.

Such natural experiences are not always available and can't be adjusted to the momentous needs of the individual. There will still be the need for the artificially prepared situations.

Snoezelen in the living quarters

In De Hartenberg we call "Mini-Snoezelen" the Snoezelen that is practised in the living quarters or in individual small rooms that are equipped for short-term use. In this institution this used to be the most common way to practice Snoezelen apart from the Snoezelen projects at the mostly fortnightly summer fair, since there were no possibilities during the rest of the year.

The room used for the "Mini-Snoezelen" is darkened most of the time. Atmospheric lights and music are switched on. The intense contact with the clients through physical contact, playing together with soft toys or Snoezelen objects or simply to experience rest and relaxation together plays a very important part.

The living quarters could also have cosy corners where elements of Snoezelen could be integrated.

De Hartenberg's view on the Snoezelen room

After all the success of Snoezelen at the summer fairs and "Mini-Snoezelen", one was longing in De Hartenberg to be able to provide one big room just for Snoezelen. The summer projects did demand a long period of preparation and vast amounts of helpers and the possibilities at "Mini-Snoezelen" were very limited. One employee used the comparison that it is nice to have a bath in one's own bathtub but once in a while it feels good to go to the swimming pool. With Snoezelen it's fairly similar, one would like to experience different things as well as leave the usual environment to "go out".

The institution is very much aware of the fact that Snoezelen is still very much in its early days of experimenting even after all the years of work and experience and that the Snoezelen room is still far from perfect even though the equipment is of a very high standard.

However, one has consciously decided to take that unsafe route of gaining practical experience on site, to get a bit closer to severely disabled residents and to be able to fulfil their needs. One is aware that there are no alternatives to Snoezelen. One of the reasons for that is the fact that one can see the danger, that there are no alternatives to Snoezelen, and therefore in institutions where it is refused, there are no offers at all.

For critics who may say that once Snoezelen becomes a habit it will quickly lose its appeal and become uninteresting that objection will be declined straight away. The euphoria and interest may die down quickly for the members of staff but disabled people feel especially at ease in a familiar environment and are able to stay interested in an activity they like for long periods of time. The mentioned objection could also be raised regarding swimming pools or other leisure time activities.

Members of staff did mention that continuing Snoezelen in the form of large projects will require a great amount of time and personal expenditure, which does bear the danger that those projects will be offered on fewer occasions or even stopped completely.

Now the permanent installed room does offer the employees the chance to make use of this facility without any preparations.

Statement

The Snoezelen room, which can be used directly by the group leaders without any preparations, does, in my opinion, make the work considerably easier but it could lead to attitude of assumption or carelessness while handling the devices and objects for which the group leaders are not directly responsible. Since the personnel will have to work with and get used to an already made up offer of objects which they have not thought of or made up, training is absolutely necessary.

To me the danger seems to be less when group leaders are involved in the organisation of Snoezelen in the form of Snoezelen workgroups and having the responsibility to schedule appointments, preparations as well as tidying up and cleaning.

Atmosphere

While listening to the description of the rooms and the individual elements one could easily get the impression, that these things are simply available in the room and one just has to chose anything like one would take a toy from a shelf or use a the activity on a play ground.

But, based on my own experience, as soon as one opens the door and enters a Snoezelen room it feels like diving into **another world**. The first impression is one of the complex atmosphere without recognising the individual elements or reasons for the effects straight away. Once one let the impression take effect and get used to it gradually only then individual objects one is interested in come in to the foreground and stimulate to see, feel, hear and experience.

The impression is probably comparable to entering a disco, a fun fair or a church where at first the entire atmosphere and mood will be taken in and only later visual, auditory and olfactorisch sense perceptions can be differentiated and put in order.

In Snoezelen it is the impression of a dream world in which one can dream and relax and by experiencing the environment one will be able to perceive ones own body more consciously. Very important elements of Snoezelen are colours, light, movement and most of all music.

Music

Music is a significant part of the special atmosphere in the Snoezelen rooms and can be heard as background music everywhere. The purpose of the music is to support the calming effect of Snoezelen and to "fill" the rooms with a warm atmosphere, which makes it easier to relax. Only the studio has its own sound system, since the consciously playful way of using the music and the stimulating effect it has matter there the most.

In all rooms are regulators to adjust the music to the needs of the individual resident. Condition for the music to have that effect is of course that the music is quiet and calm that means it has no hyped up melodies, rhythm, tempo or harmonies and is not too loud. A Snoezelen room is not a disco even if a lot of the light effects are the same.

Short interruptions between the musical pieces or switching off temporarily can result in the visitors being surprised and missing the music therefore registering music altogether more consciously. Music therapist have the view that one is not very active while listening to Snoezelen music but not passive either. A sort of "swinging along" takes place appropriate to the disabled person's level. Light classical music, vocal or instrumental pieces with preferably only one voice or one instrument or one instrument in the foreground as well as light entertaining music are very suitable as Snoezelen music.

One can put the tapes together in different ways for example only entertaining or classical music, offering both types in turns or one can let very contrasting pieces of music follow one another.

Besides the relatively short pieces especially found in entertaining music (approximately 3 ½ minutes) longer musical pieces i.e. 10-20 minutes of a single pan pipe could be played, to make it possible to listen into a musical piece and to avoid letting it fly by as could happen by listening to shorter pieces.

The so called principles for the arranging of the music and the use of it is based on the experiences of music therapist of the institution and are passed on by him as advice to the group leaders

The Snoezelen Complex in the De Hartenberg Centre

Since February 1984 in De Hartenberg near Ede is a big central Snoezelen complex in operation. This Snoezelen Centre was intensely used up until September 2000. Since September 2000 a completely new room of approximately 410 metres square is in operation.

One then decided consciously, for central Snoezelen premises as part of the daily activity concept. The centre is open daily from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon. There is no set timetable. The groups from the living quarters and from the daily activities can come into the room at any time they want. The size of the groups is decided by the group leader, but one can also come alone. The size of the groups and the frequency of visits do depend on availability of personnel, the degree of disabilities, the behaviour of individual visitors, different activities as well as the weather. Since one is at liberty to use the room at any time one can spontaneously decide to practice Snoezelen. There are no restricting timetables one has to stick to. That makes it easier to respond to clients' activities more consciously.

At the same time parents have the chance to practise Snoezelen with their children at any time without having to make an appointment. They make great use of that.

Besides the permanent available Snoezelen Complex there are enough opportunities to practise Snoezelen in natural living and life situations in the daily contact with the residents as well as in temporarily installed Snoezelen rooms in the living quarters.

The new Snoezelen Complex has four rooms: a projector room (White room) of 6 by 11 metres, a room for feeling with sound effects (room for listening) of 6 by 11 metres, a corridor of 18 by 2.5 metres with different materials and a ball pond room of 6 by 11 metres. The centre is accessible through a wide door. Once through that door you come into the corridor with two light effect floors and a foot carillon in between. Opposite the carillon is a combined warm and cold air scented wall. In the corridor one can also find a scented tube stand, different touch boards and feel boxes. In the corner is a mirror wall which, combined with the light floor, does supply a vast offer of effects. From the corridor you can enter into all the other rooms.

The projector room is completely covered in white soft flooring. In there is an embedded sort of an island with three bubble units. As well as the floor, ceilings and walls are white too. Liquid-, Slide- and film projectors, mirrored glass balls, soap bubble machine can be served with a remote control.

The room for feeling also has a soft floor. There are touch boards on the walls as well. At different places there are soft touch objects one can crawl through.

There is a range of "touch curtains" hanging on a rail. The windows have coloured Perspex glasses.

In the studio the importance lies with the combination of light and sound. In a wall across the room is a light screen installed, that translates every sound into a light picture. In front of the distorted mirror, the light organ and the drapes is a vibrating floor that invites to feel the different sounds. An echo sound system does add an extra dimension to the room. With the help of a CD player music can be played. If one uses cordless headphones, the great effect can be enjoyed even more, it feels like being in a huge grotto. A seating element does provide the comfort needed.

A soft border along the walls surrounds the ball pond. It serves as a seating or lying down area as well as padded protection between wall and balls. On the ceiling above the ball pond is a semi-circular mirror and along the walls are mirrors too. One can keep occupied by simply observing oneself and the depth effect of the room is increased. Sound and light apparatus are as far as possible based in a separate central room, to avoid, visitors handling them wrongly unintentionally. That measure was also essential for fire safety.

Experts have installed the entire Snoezelen complex in De Hartenberg. That was necessary to meet the terms of fire safety, servicing and maintenance etc. Meanwhile the higher investment costs have been proven to be justified

The cleaning does take up relatively little time; only the ball pond requires half a day of maintenance once a fortnight. Defects are rare up to date, the biggest cost factor as ever is the regular needed change of projector and light bulbs.

There is a huge interest even beyond the De Hartenberg Centre. At certain times groups from other

institutions have the chance to come to us to practice Snoezelen.
Many non-disabled children make use of our Snoezelen rooms too, for a birthday party for example.

Description of the Snoezelen room in De Hartenberg Centre

There are different possibilities to equip a Snoezelen room:

1. One does create a room to serve all the senses
2. One divides the room in such a way that different areas are created in which one or two senses can be addressed
3. One has several rooms available in which one sense at a time can be addressed.

Such divisions depend on the space availability in the institution rather than the content of ideas.

In De Hartenberg are three rooms and a corridor to link them available but one does only talk about “the Snoezelen room”. One can expect that in each of the rooms a certain atmosphere will be present or rather a certain area of perception will be addressed. An exact separation between the senses is not given and can hardly be realised anyway. But that is not the aim, but the elimination of unnecessary, unpleasant and distracting stimuli

To get a better picture, I will describe the rooms’ one after the other with their special possibilities and difficulties. A few overlaps cannot be avoided.



Ball Pond

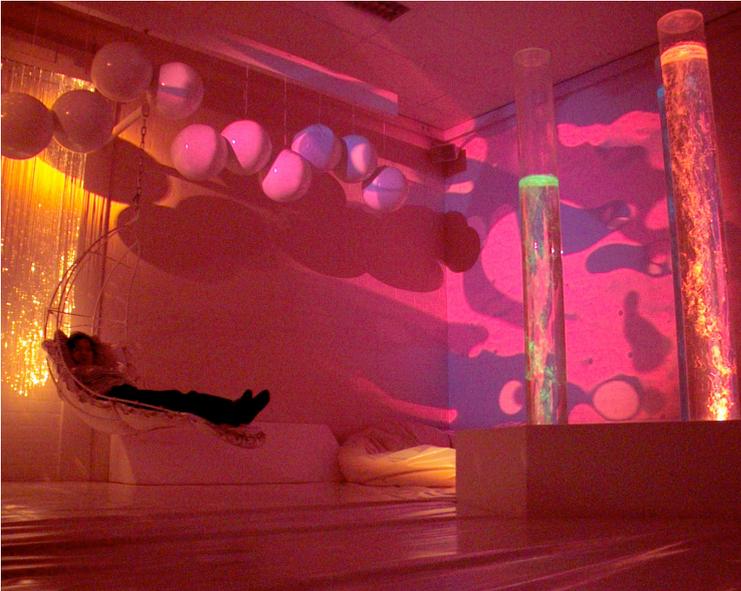
In the 6 by 11 metres big room, painted yellow, are two ball ponds. Surrounded by a 70 centimetre high yellow and red border of soft play material there are approximately 60 000 coloured balls each with a diameter of 6 centimetre. One can lie on top of the balls, bury oneself or other people in them completely, throw the balls, feel them individually and play with them. A slow approach to the unknown situation is possible since there is enough free space in the entrance area (also important for wheelchair access) to simply watch the ball pond and those already present. It is possible to walk around the pond on the 50 centimetre wide edge. It is also possible to approach the balls by simply sitting on that edge and allowing the legs to dangle and play with a few balls. To glide into the balls is unusual since they will move in to all different directions and one will sink in faster the more one moves. Many residents have fun; others do feel frightened that the ground underneath their bodies is so uncertain. Experiences

made here are of a more tactile nature.

The PVC mirrors on the walls as well as the semi-circled mirror on the ceiling above the balls offer additional stimuli.

One can observe oneself in the mirror on the ceiling while lying on the balls and throw the balls towards the mirror. They will seem to get bigger the closer they get to the mirror.

A passive experience of the situation as well as all sorts of playing activities, are possible in this room.



The white room

The room measures approximately 6 by 11 metres, is 5.5 metres high and completely white.

Here mainly visual stimuli in the form of light effects are offered. Due to the white interior the room is suitable as a projector screen for:

-Slides

Mainly pictures of nature

-Films

Due to the variety of colours, slow camera movements and slow movements of the animals, films by Jacques Cousteau about the under water World without any sound are very suitable

-Liquid projectors

The apparatus produces a round, slowly rotating picture, in which multi coloured objects shaped like water drops float into one another

All these projectors are kept in a little room on the first floor of the building and point into the white room through a window in such a way, that they can be projected onto three walls. One feels like standing in the middle of the play of colours and lights.

Further light effects are achieved by illuminating rotating mirror balls as well as so called bubble units and fibre lights. There is also a device to produce soap bubbles.

-Bubble units

Bubble units are perspex tubes filled with water; underneath each one is an air pump a lighting fixtures attached.

With the incoming air, air bubbles rise constantly and are illuminated by a light which has a multicoloured disc and changes colour every 15 seconds.

There are three of these units in the room, all of them embedded on a hexagonal stage. Two of the tubes are 1,80 metres high and the third one is 2,30 metres. They each have a diameter of 20 centimetres and can be switched on individually or in combination.

-Mirror balls

There are two balls of different sizes, which are covered in little mirror tiles and rotate with the help of a little engine. Spotlights illuminate them.

This creates the effect of slowly moving light spots over wall and ceiling, which can constantly change their colour because of the multicoloured rotating disc moving in front of the light. These balls are also known as Disco balls.

- Soap bubble machine

Soap bubbles are blown into the room automatically.



The described apparatus and lights can be switched on and off via a control panel, using a remote control. The fibre lights can be switched on and off using the switch beside the lamps. By choosing varied combinations of the activities one can create all different effects.

In the white room half way up the wall are besides the mentioned mirrors other objects attached to adjustable rails, which serve the purpose of decoration as well as play, for example big wooden birds which swing once someone pulls on the string. There are also long PVC tubes filled with air hanging down almost touching the floor.

The entire floor is covered in a soft play material. Two of these mattresses close to the door can be removed to allow wheelchair access if one does not want to lift residents out of their wheelchairs.

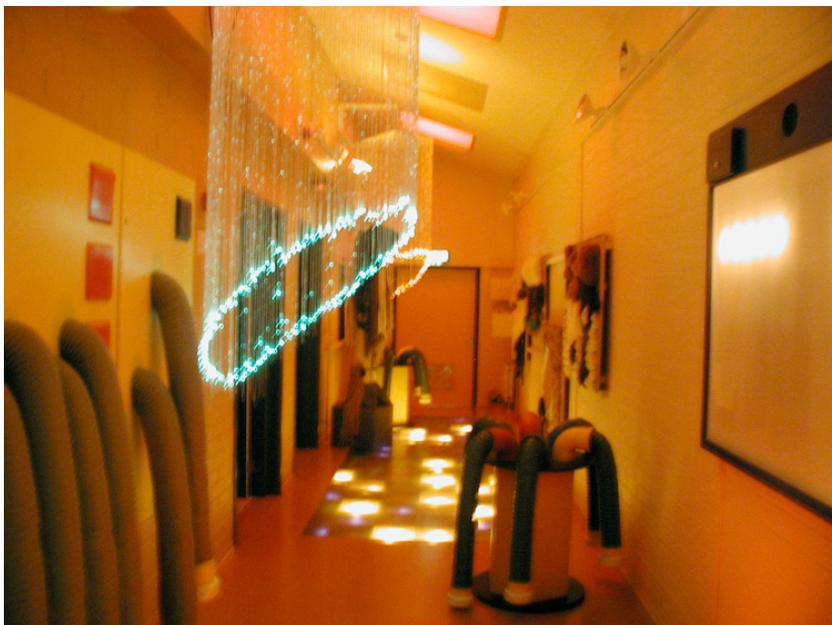
One thick air filled PVC tube is moving on the floor along three of the walls to allow a comfortable position that makes it easier to observe the light effects on the walls.

The room does impress with its height and white interior alone and is very popular with the group leaders and residents. The different light effects change by colours and movements never get boring and invite you to dream and simply switch off. In there the feeling to be in the middle of a dream world is the strongest.

Similar to the ball pond here the different demands of the individual visitor can be met too. The fascinating atmosphere alone does have the effect on people to feel very relaxed and invites you to just watch and be amazed. Some people do only react to strong light and dark contrasts, which can be created by switching on and off several devices at the same time.

Others just walk about the room and touch the different air tubes hanging down from the ceiling, playing with them or approaching the lights and bubble units to investigate those. Some do even understand the link between remote control and light effects and try to experiment with them.

The devices used in that room like bubble units, liquid projectors and mirror balls are also used for Snoezelen in other institutions, since they are very stimulating. In the meantime they are a permanent part of a typical Snoezelen atmosphere.



Anteroom

Between the corridor and the white room is a small anteroom (2 by 2 metres). In the centre a curtain of phosphorescing PVC strings is hanging down as well as a perspex mirror that is put up the wall with the same strings attached to it. By illuminating them with black light they shine in very groovy colours.

These coloured strings are for the non-disabled a rather optical, nice decoration whereby many of our visitors often grab them and play with them shaking them back and forth, to hear the rustling noise, put them around themselves or put them into their mouth etc. The thick knotted woolly ropes in the corridor are treated in a similar way.

Tactile and Auditory room

This room is covered in soft play material apart from one space. In there is a waterbed with a sound floor embedded. The water temperature can be regulated. The waterbed is the most attractive and most used object in the room. Attached to the walls are boards covered in all different materials and furs. They offer various tactile experiences. There is also sort of an igloo made of soft play material, one can crawl into.

Hanging down from the ceiling and almost touching the floor are various soft and sound toys, attached to elastic rubber strings. The strings are meant to make it easier for the disabled visitors to reach the

toys even if they let go of them once in a while. There are more soft toys on the floor. The earlier mentioned wooden birds can be found here as well hanging from the ceiling. Many different coloured ceiling lights, whose brightness can be regulated with a dimmer, provide light.

In this room opening the shutters can let in daylight. The window glasses are green, red and yellow and create a different view into the outside world. For many people the suddenly changing intensity of the daylight is already a variation of stimuli they perceive and clearly react to. The contrast of light makes one aware of how used one was to the dimmed warm light and the atmosphere of cosy safety, once the room turns bright all of a sudden.

In the same room 3 by 4 metres a vibrating floor is built in and linked with a screen. The combination makes a conscious experiencing of music and sounds and the playful use possible.

The lights of a big light organ are linked with the sound system and pointed at the perspex mirrors on the wall, which then project lights onto a screen. The observer can see the music matching light reflexes on that screen which measures approximately 3 by 5,50 metres.

The light organ can also be linked with an echo-microphone so that the light effects can be triggered by ones own voice, musical instruments or other sounds, which then can be heard strongly delayed. The acoustic impression when using headphones is extremely fascinating. For residents who perceive very slowly, the delayed playback of their own voice is quite an experience. Once they realise the link between their own sounds and the light effects, they become very motivated to make new noises while under normal circumstances not everybody would have been up for that.

In the room a vibrating floor is built that swings in such a way that the music can not only be heard and seen through the light effects but the vibrations can also be felt with the entire body.

The corridor

The corridor does link all the rooms described so far and does offer many more interesting perceptions. For example the biggest part is made of a light floor. The perspex surface is set on wooden planks set out in a grid format. Each square of the grid does contain a coloured light, which is linked with the sound system and react like a light organ to rhythm and melody.

Constantly changing combinations of the lights do first of all create very interesting light effects and secondly heats the floor in the different areas to give a warm feeling.

In the middle of the aisle is the carillon. It is made of nine 40 by 40 cm PVC tiles, which are embedded in the floor. Stepping on one of the tiles activates a bell to ring and a light to flash. Bells and lights are located in a light panel on the wall and can also be activated by touching this light panel.

There are also touch boards with sponges, brushes and other materials as well as a PVC mirror in one corner. As already mentioned, thick knotted woolly ropes are hanging down from the ceiling. In the corridor besides these visual, auditory and tactile stimuli are also so called "sniff snakes" to stimulate the sense of smell. These are two rotating stands each of them has a wooden board attached to them with coloured P-traps known from pipe work fixed onto them. Attached to those are elastic PVC tubes, similar to those used for cooker hoods. A concentrated scent will be placed on the wooden board, which can be smelled intensely through the tubes. Due to the flexibility of the tubes it is possible to reach different positions to allow wheel chair users and tall people the same comfortable position to make use of the activity.

The equipment of the described rooms is only one of many. Which devices, materials and playing materials will be chosen for the equipment of a Snoezelen room does depend on the individual views but also very much from financial resources and spatial possibilities.

For the summer fairs at De Hartenberg for example a water-organ was hired, which was very attractive but much too expensive to purchase for a permanent room.

Some ideas like putting up large pieces of cloth in the tactile room had to be scrapped due to fire safety reasons. Others could not be realised due to space restrictions. It is obvious that there are no activities

at all for the sense of taste. In De Hartenberg we haven't had very pleasant experiences during our summer fairs. Hygiene is a big problem and most of the residents do not try out food consciously but stuff themselves with everything. It was therefore decided against that for educational as well as organisational reasons in the permanent Snoezelen room. But in other institutions one can find offers like that. There a member of staff will make food available just before a Snoezelen session. It has happened in individual cases that disabled people have stuffed themselves with the food until they have felt sick but it is of course a question of the quality of company.

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