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Space Architecture: Habitats, Habitability, and Bases (1)

Author: Prof. Phyllis Johnson
University of British Columbia, Canada, phyllis.johnson@ubc.ca

Dr. Jelena Brcic
University of British Columbia, Canada, jelenabrcic@psych.ubc.ca

Dr. Peter Suedfeld
University of British Columbia, Canada, psuedfeld@psych.ubc.ca

ASTRONAUTS AT HOME ON THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

Abstract

Fourteen astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS) responded to questionnaires about this topic twice: soon after arriving on the station and shortly before leaving it several months later. The astronauts were asked about their perceptions of the ISS environment: did it seem like home, what did they do to make it feel more so, and what aspects of the internal environment (their personal quarters, the workspaces, decorations and facilities), its relations to Earth (communications, supplies, visual contact, long-range relationship with family and others), and crew interactions (learning and creating spaceflight traditions, joint work and leisure activities, sharing of cultural and culinary diversity, holiday celebrations) contributed to making it more of a home, and what aspects made it less so. There was unanimous agreement that a special shared space culture does exist into which newcomers fit themselves but which they also modify; that privacy in quarters, solitude, and freedom to display mementos of home as well as arrange liked and needed items, make positive contributions. So do the many activities shared by the crew, especially preparing and eating meals together, and the pride of mutual help, cooperation, and overcoming challenges. Conversations, messages and packages from the astronaut's terrestrial home are also helpful in most instances although they sometimes result in homesickness.