

Rehabilitation Through Design: A Study of Various Design Aspects to Facilitate Rehabilitation in Criminals

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Abstract

The concept of rehabilitation of criminals is a vital component of contemporary justice system, that focuses on reduction of recidivism rates and reintegrate the offenders as contributing citizens in society. Although the vocational, educational and other psychological methods are well-known incorporations in penitentiaries facilitating rehabilitation; architecture design as a tool offering various design principles that foster rehabilitation are yet to be explored. Thus, this research aims to explore various design principles and their impact as rehabilitative measure in prisons; emphasizing factors including spatial arrangement, incorporation of green spaces, use of natural light, bifurcated private and communal areas, etc. Delving into case study of Norway's Halden Prison, this research highlights how therapeutic environments can promote skill-development and positive behavior amongst inmates. Key findings suggest that thoughtfully designed spaces promote dignity, reduce stress, and motivate involvement in rehabilitation activities. The paper concludes by summarizing all the design aspects that foster rehabilitation in prisons not hampering the security of the institution.

Keywords: Design principles, Incarceration, Penitentiary, Rehabilitation, Recidivism

1. Introduction

According to Oxford dictionary, a prison can be defined as “a building in which people are legally held as a punishment for a crime they have committed or while awaiting a trial.” Prison is not only a space to confine criminals, but also to rehabilitate them out of the criminal psychology they possess to reduce recidivism. Architecture can contribute to designing for this rehabilitation purpose to improve the life of prisoners who are released in society after completing their sentences.

This research focuses on the relationship between space design and psychology in prisons; design elements and spaces facilitating rehabilitation. This study will help us to understand the potential of design in reducing recidivism rates. It will explore various design elements and spatial organization techniques that facilitate rehabilitation. The study will be limited to secondary data collection and will not delve deeply into criminal psychology, rather will focus on the design aspects of this field.

2. Literature Review

1. History of prisons and concept of rehabilitation

The concept of penitentiaries as a form of punishment has developed over the centuries, shifting from

spaces purely focused on retribution to institutions that aim for the rehabilitation of offenders. The history of prisons in the meantime reflects the change of society's attitude towards crime, justice and the purpose of incarceration.

1.1. Old prisons

Before 18th century, prisons were mere a small form of punishment, rather the offenders were either exiled for major crimes; transported to other places or being charged fines for petty offences. The political order sought to maintain power over commoners through the terror of the gallows. Secondly, prisons were makeshift structures and were used for profit, where the inmates needed to pay rent for their time of detention. (Carrabine, 2010)

1.2. 19th century developments

The penitentiary movement led to configured environments that aimed at moral improvement. Auburn system that focused on labor and discipline and Pennsylvania system emphasizing solitude and reflection emerged, that achieved rehabilitation with mixed success rate. John Howard and Elizabeth fry were reformers, advocated for better prison conditions and educational programs. (Morris & Rothman, 1998)

1.3. Modern prisons and rehabilitation

In the beginning of 20th century, the influence of psychological theories of behavior changes led to shift the focus from punitive measures to rehabilitation. Incorporation of vocational training, educational programs and therapeutic interventions in many correctional facilities were a result of this reform in society. Many Scandinavian countries became pioneers of prisons focusing rehabilitation rather than confinement, emphasizing reintegration of offenders into society. (Morris & Rothman, 1998)

1.4. Rehabilitation today

Today, rehabilitation is the key focus in several penitentiaries, particularly in places guided by restorative justice. Although, the success of this system depends on factors such as support, public attitudes and well-designed facilities that combine security with opportunities for personal growth.

2. Architecture and rehabilitation

Architecture influences all the aspects of our life, including those who turn their lives towards delinquency. The built environment plays a crucial role in shaping the way we conduct our daily lives. Elements of architecture such as natural light, spatial layout, green spaces, calming colours, etc. can foster a rehabilitative environment. Conversely, inadequately designed facilities with overcrowding, limited privacy, and harsh conditions develop stress and hamper rehabilitation. (Backstrom, et al., 2022)

The following elements have a major role in facilitating rehabilitation in prisons:

- 1. Access to natural light and views** – Natural light assists in reducing feelings of isolation and depression, fostering a sense of normalcy.
- 2. Spatial layout and privacy** - Spaces that provide privacy as well as enables social interaction support prisoners' psychological well-being and sovereignty. Overcrowded and inadequately zoned facilities contribute to stress, aggression, and conflict.
- 3. Communal and activity spaces** – Vocational training spaces for education, work, and recreation enhance inmates' sense of purpose and skill development which is essential for successful rehabilitation. Active engagement in organized programs within well-designed spaces boosts positive social change and will reduces recidivism rates.

4. **Outdoor spaces and greenery** – Access to outdoor spaces promotes physical activity and psychological relaxation. Physical exercise, gardening programs, and quiet reflection are facilitated through provision of these elements.
5. **Secure yet humane environments** – Severely harsh security measures can inculcate stress and aggression among inmates thus a balance between safety and a rehabilitative environment is necessary. (Backstrom, et al., 2022)



Figure 1 Prison

3. Halden Prison, Norway: Epitome of Rehabilitative Penitentiary

The Halden Prison, opened in 2010, designed by Erik Møller Architects and HLM Arkitekter; has 250-cell capacity spread over 30 acres of forest land. (Vinnitskaya, 2011)

The institution is situated in a forested area with several building blocks, each block possessing its own outlook and material, the intent being to produce a variety filled prison. The facades shift on the basis of level of security – colors and materials engraved in the facilities rocks and vegetation. (Vinnitskaya, 2011)



Figure 2 Halden Prison

Architecture features incorporated in Halden Prison promoting rehabilitation are –

1. **Principal of normalization** – The facility mimics the outside world as closely as possible, reducing the difference between incarceration and reintegration. Incorporation of communal living areas, allocation of private rooms with attached washrooms and lack of visible bars makes the space feel less like a conventional imprisonment.
2. **Access to nature** – Large windows with views of surrounding forest, outdoor walking paths and greenery incorporated in the facility improves the mental wellbeing of inmates and acts as therapy for them.
3. **Spatial organization** – The layout of the facility promotes social interaction, including communal kitchens and shared living spaces. Spacious cells encased dignity in the minds of prisoners.
4. **Use of material and colors** – Materials like wood and neutral color scheme forms the theme of the institution, creating a calming environment thus reducing stress and aggression, fostering rehabilitation.
5. **Support for daily routines and skill development** – Vocational training spaces like mechanical workshop, music production, gardening workshops, etc. are core part of rehabilitation facility in Halden prison.

(Ugelvik, 2016)



Figure 3 Halden Prison layout

4. Key findings

The gist of this research suggests that prisons should not only focus on punitive measures to correct the offenders, but it also requires rehabilitative facilities to ensure that those prisoners who will be reintegrated into the society prove to be contributing citizens rather than them turning to recidivism. Architecture plays a major role in facilitating rehabilitation and the spaces designed impact on the psychology of inmates.

The use of design elements to improve the psychology of offenders and make efforts to reintegrate them in the society is the major finding from this research.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded from the research that we as architects can implement the knowledge of designing spaces and apply the design elements so that it can be utilized for the betterment of society. It can help reducing the crime rates and hence the contribution of architecture in reducing recidivism is significant.

6. References

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Sources of Figure

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