

**REDESIGNING INCARCERATION:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE
INFLUENCE OF PRISON ARCHITECTURE
AT HALDEN PRISON**

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OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDY

- Prison architecture and rehabilitation
- Halden prison as agent of change
- Purpose of current study
- Research design and methods
- Major findings



PRISON ARCHITECTURE AND REHABILITATION

- The “pains of imprisonment” are a challenge to penal reform
- Growing attention on the influence of prison design
- Some evidence that prison design increase well-being of inmates:
 - Access to natural light and fresh air
 - Green spaces/natural landscaping
 - Color schemes
 - Lighting and building materials



HALDEN PRISON “AN IRON FIST WITH A SILK GLOVE ON”

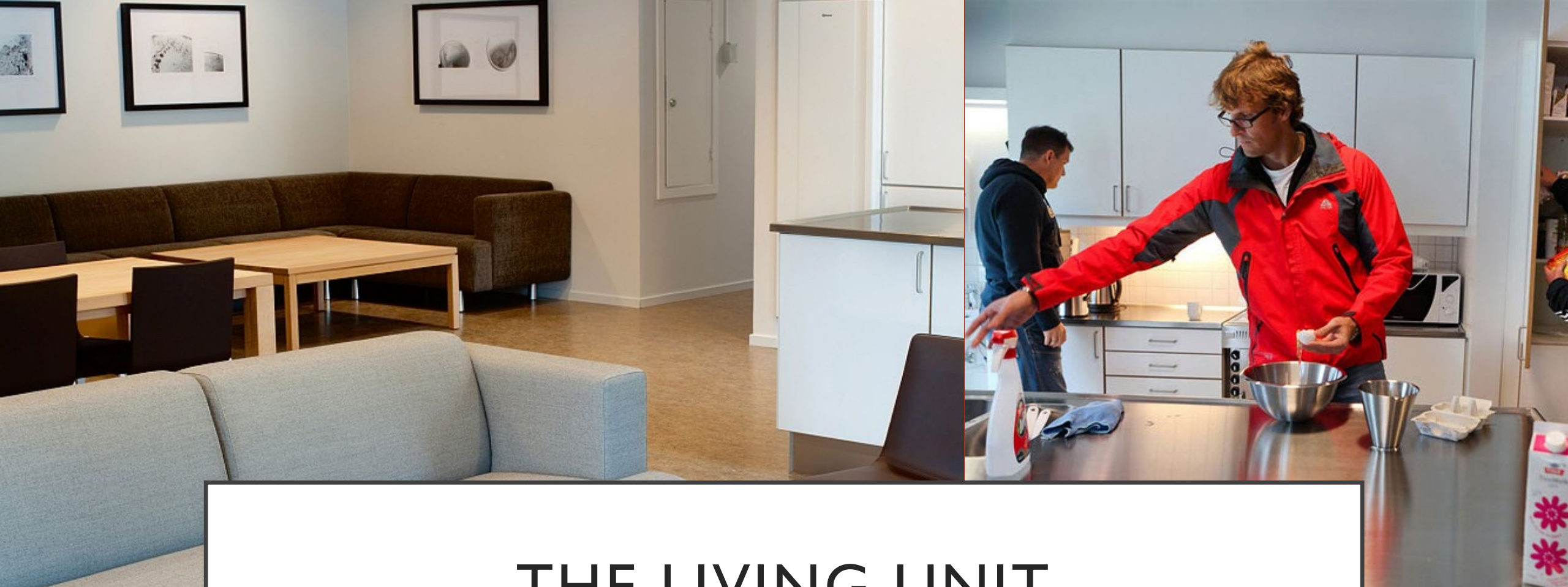
- Modern achievement in prison design
- Was designed by architects to consciously utilize physical design and environment to influence human behaviors and emotions
- Goal to minimize suffering and maximize therapeutic benefits (not just be comfortable)



INFLUENCE OF
ARCHITECTURAL
DESIGN

Rehabilitative Elements of Design

- Provide safe and humane conditions
- Create sense of normality
- Division between public and private spaces
- Incorporate nature within prison
- Types of building materials and color schemes
- Inclusion of natural light and vegetation



THE LIVING UNIT



THE CELL



THE PRISON YARD



CURRENT STUDY

- Interviews with 46 incarcerated men
 - English (n=21) and Norwegian (n=25)
- Explores attitudes and perceptions of the physical environment on inmates:
 - Overall perceptions of conditions
 - Sense of normality
 - Mental well-being
 - Motivation for change
- Interviews transcribed and coded using NVivo 12

SENSE OF NORMALITY

- Participants did not feel these routines/minor decisions mirrored outside life or made up for loss of autonomy in other areas:
 - Lacked freedom of movement (esp. going outdoors)
 - Limitations on visitation and communication with family
 - Constant presence of officers
 - Visual reminders of imprisonment (wall, cameras)
 - Difficulty with scheduling issues (e.g., medical appointments)



...for me there is no normality whatsoever because you're constantly reminded of where you are, so personally, there's no way...your liberty is taken away, and that's supposed to be the sentence, and that is a sentence, no matter how much they try to make the area surrounding us feel or seem like a normal situation, it doesn't work. You always know that you're in prison, you always know that you're incarcerated, and everything you do tells you, you can't do this, you can't do that, there are rules for everything... (Interview Participant #16)

MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Overall participants did not identify aspects of Halden's design or environment as having a positive or therapeutic effect on their mental well being (with exception of private cells)
- Some acknowledgement that private cells allowed a space to be alone, unwind, or calm down if feeling agitated or having a conflict
- Community rooms were seen as helpful in building relationships



MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Participants did NOT report experiencing or observing physical assaults on their unit and very few had witnessed verbal altercations
- Prisoners are not engaging in conflicts with one another or with staff

I: Do you believe you get any privacy in here?

P: Yes...I compare this with the States....people are often always about me and my country, but if you see a little further than your nose, you'll see people have it much worse. Compared to the States, it's luxury. Of course, I have my own room, I can close my door and take off the key.

I: Other than it being nice to have your own room, does it help or hurt?

P: ...Nobody can see through my cell door, nobody can come and bother me if I don't like it...sometimes ten people in one unit can make problems...[when] you get tired...of this is and that...it's important to go and have your own space. (Interview Participant #11)

MOTIVATION FOR REHABILITATION

- While recognizing Halden's features and environment as positive, participants did not connect features to motivation for rehabilitation
- Participants strongly identified family as source of motivation
- Others mentioned themselves (but did not connect change of attitudes/goals a result of physical design)



I: ...How would you describe the facilities, the physical living conditions of Halden?

P: It's beautiful. Really, it's beautiful.

I: Does the beauty of it help you in any way?

P: No, no. You know the toilet can be made of diamonds, but still, you're locked up, man. It makes no difference if it's made of gold or diamonds, or metal, you're still locked up, it's no difference. (Interview respondent #14)



I: Okay...do the physical living conditions...motivate you? I mean... do they make the days go by any easier, do they make you want to try to improve yourself...seek out help... is it a therapeutic environment, in any way?

P: I think a prison is a prison. I don't really feel anything therapeutic about it. Not even a little bit. (Interview Participant #15)

I: [do] the physical living conditions and the way Halden is built affect you positively or affect the execution of the sentence in a positive or negative manner. Does it affect you psychologically or?

P: Yes, that it doesn't work the way the legislation says it should...it really doesn't matter what it looks like. It does not give me anything else after I'm released if I have stayed at the world's finest cell in the world's finest prison.

I: Does it motivate you in any way?

P: There is no such thing as motivation in squared walls.
(Participant #23)





I: ...do you believe the physical conditions and the way Halden was built motivate you in any way?

P: Yeah, if I'm sitting with one person with...bars and not a lot of light, like a cage...like which...you put an animal in the cage...and you don't have contact... this become sad and desperate.

(Interview Participant #12)



CONCLUSIONS

- Despite positive comments, participants did not explicitly identify qualities of the Halden model or prison design as motivating or therapeutic
- Participants made it clear that while Halden's amenities and physical features are nice, the "pains of imprisonment" are acutely felt

CONCLUSIONS

- However, responses indicated that Halden's approach to corrections kept people safe, reduced conflict, and reduced likelihood people would turn to deviance/aggression to cope with the conditions of incarceration
- Therefore, while participants didn't think of Halden as therapeutic, it appeared to have a protective effect in reducing the criminogenic aspects of incarceration



LIMITATIONS OF STUDY AND ITEMS OF CONSIDERATION

- Certain items are worth considering:
 - No comparison group
 - Sample does not distinguish by type of custody and prior/alternative location prison experience
 - Inmates may not be able to comprehend influence of physical space and architecture at a sub-conscious level
 - Reinforces how painful loss of liberty is and the need to avoid inhumane and degrading conditions

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