

Rebecca Walter & Mirjam Habisreutinger*

Prison Spaces and Rehabilitation: A Multi-Perspective Qualitative Analysis of the Built Environment in Austrian Prisons

Over time, the built environment of prisons has shifted from a primary focus on security and control toward recognition of its impact on incarcerated individuals' well-being, rehabilitation, and personal agency. Based on qualitative research in nine Austrian prisons, this article examines how the organization, accessibility, and usability of prison spaces shape experiences of imprisonment, institutional security, and rehabilitation conditions. The article draws on interviews with incarcerated individuals and staff, staff-only focus groups, and structured on-site visits. The findings illustrate how access, location, equipment, atmosphere, and everyday usability may shape perceptions of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality, and relate to the rehabilitative potential of prison spaces. The analysis further points to discrepancies between intended spatial functions and actual use, along with tensions between security requirements and rehabilitative goals. It concludes that the built environment must be considered together with organizational and social factors to support rehabilitation rather than reinforce existing disadvantages.

Keywords: Empirical Research, Multi-Perspective Qualitative Analysis, Prison Architecture and Design, Prison Research, Rehabilitation

Gefängnisräume und Rehabilitation: Eine multiperspektivische qualitative Analyse der gebauten Umwelt in österreichischen Justizanstalten

Gefängnisse werden zunehmend nicht nur mit Blick auf Sicherheit und Kontrolle geplant und gebaut, sondern auch unter Berücksichtigung der Frage, wie räumliche Bedingungen das Wohlbefinden, die Rehabilitation und die persönliche Handlungsfähigkeit inhaftierter Personen beeinflussen. Auf Grundlage qualitativer Forschung in neun Justizanstalten untersucht der Artikel, wie Organisation, Zugänglichkeit und Nutzbarkeit von Räumen Erfahrungen von Inhaftierung, institutioneller Sicherheit und rehabilitativen Bedingungen prägen. Der Artikel stützt sich dabei auf Interviews, Fokusgruppen sowie auf strukturierte Vor-Ort-Besichtigungen. Die Ergebnisse veranschaulichen, wie Zugang, Lage, Ausstattung, Atmosphäre und alltägliche Nutzung Wahrnehmungen von Würde, Privatsphäre, Autonomie und Normalität beeinflussen können und mit dem rehabilitativen Potenzial von Gefängnisräumen zusammenhängen. Die Analyse verweist zudem auf Spannungen zwischen Sicherheitsanforderungen und rehabilitativen Zielen sowie auf Diskrepanzen zwischen intendierten räumlichen Funktionen und tatsächlicher

*We thank all the participants of the study, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice for granting access to the facilities and the Austrian Security Research Program (KIRAS/FFG) for funding the initial project. Special thanks to the ESSDDP project team and to Andrea Fritsche, Walter Hammerschick, Claudia Körmer for their feedback.

Throughout writing this article, the authors used ChatGPT 4o, Claude Sonnet 4.6 and DeepL to improve the linguistic formulation. The authors are solely responsible for the content.

Nutzung. Der Artikel kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die bauliche Umgebung gemeinsam mit organisatorischen und sozialen Faktoren berücksichtigt werden muss, um Rehabilitation zu unterstützen, anstatt bestehende Benachteiligungen zu verstärken.

Schlagwörter: Empirische Sozialforschung; Gefängnisarchitektur; Gefängnisforschung; Multiperspektivische qualitative Forschung; Resozialisierung

1. Introduction

The way prisons are designed, built, and organized has historically reflected changing penal philosophies, from control, surveillance, and the management of incarcerated individuals' labor toward increasing attention to well-being, rehabilitation, and the lived experience of imprisonment (Foucault, 1979; Johnston, 2009; Moran & Jewkes, 2015; Rubin, 2023; Seelich, 2009; Wener, 2012). With early prison designs primarily prioritizing security, discipline, and institutional order, and thereby often paying little attention to the welfare of incarcerated individuals (Rubin, 2023; Seelich, 2009; Wener, 2012), scholarly attention has since shifted more strongly toward how the built environment affects everyday prison life, institutional relationships, and the conditions under which rehabilitation can take place (Jewkes, 2018; Moran & Jewkes, 2015; Nadel & Mears, 2020).

The relevance of prison design is reflected in a growing body of research showing that environmental and spatial conditions, including factors such as overcrowding, noise, lack of privacy, access to natural light, communal spaces, greenery, and acoustic conditions, can affect stress, well-being, social interaction, and institutional life in prisons (Beijersbergen et al., 2016; Bernheimer et al., 2017; Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2023; Ireland & Culpin, 2006; Jewkes, 2018; Moran et al., 2023; Wener, 2012). Overcrowding, for example, has been linked to higher rates of suicide, disciplinary infractions, and psychiatric admissions (Cox et al., 1984; Farrington & Nuttall, 1980; Johnsen et al., 2014), whereas access to nature and greenery has been associated with improved well-being, mood, and self-esteem, particularly when combined with physical activity (Barton & Pretty, 2010; Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2023; Jewkes, 2018; Moran et al., 2023). Studies have also indicated that specific design features, such as access to daylight, the quality of communal areas, acoustic conditions, and opportunities for social interaction, shape how incarcerated individuals and staff experience institutional environments (Bernheimer et al., 2017; Evans, 2003; Frontczak & Wargocki, 2011; Galouzis et al., 2023; Ireland & Culpin, 2006; Moore, 1981; Stansfeld & Matheson, 2003).

Within this field, different approaches have developed that examine the spatial and ethical dimensions of imprisonment more explicitly, such as 'carceral geography' (Moran, 2015; Moran & Jewkes, 2015), a subdiscipline of geography, that examines how prison environments shape the lived experiences of incarcerated individuals and influence broader societal perceptions of punishment and rehabilitation, and 'ethical prison architecture' (Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022), emphasizing the relationship between the physical environment and the well-being of incarcerated individuals and staff. These more recent approaches share an interest in prison space not merely as a physical container of punishment, but as an active element in shaping emotions, behavior, relationships, and institutional practices (Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022; Galouzis et al., 2023; Jewkes, 2018; Moran & Jewkes, 2015). At the same

time, research cautions against assuming that newer, more homelike prison environments automatically result in humane imprisonment, as they may also intensify the awareness of confinement and the pain of lost freedom (Brottveit, 2018; Marti, 2025).

Despite the growing interest in this field, empirical research on how prison spaces affect everyday life and rehabilitative conditions remains limited (Nadel & Mears, 2020), with even less known about how specific spaces are perceived, accessed, used, and organizationally mediated in daily institutional practice (Marti, 2025). This article addresses this gap through a multi-perspective qualitative analysis of how selected prison spaces in nine Austrian prisons may hinder or support rehabilitation, bringing together the perspectives of incarcerated individuals and prison staff with structured on-site visits. It asks how these spaces are accessed, used, and experienced in everyday institutional practice, and how their accessibility, usability, spatial arrangement, security requirements, and sensory atmosphere shape experiences of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality in ways that may support or constrain rehabilitative processes in prison.

In the Austrian prison system, rehabilitation or reintegration is not explicitly defined as such within the law. Rather, the legal purpose of imprisonment remains strongly shaped by security concerns and “educational influence,” aiming to foster a law-abiding attitude in incarcerated individuals, prevent harmful inclinations, and prepare them for reintegration into society (Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice, 1969, Section 20(1); Drexler & Weger, 2022, p. 76). As this legal framing does not provide a sufficient theoretical basis for the present analysis, the article draws on a broader understanding of rehabilitation. Following Galouzis et al. (2023), rehabilitation is understood as a multifaceted process shaped by the interaction between individual agency and the institutional conditions under which this agency can be exercised. In prison, agency is constrained by rules, surveillance, spatial separation, and dependence on staff decisions, reflecting the inherently disempowering character of imprisonment and its rigid institutional routines (Foucault, 1979; Irwin & Owen, 2005). In this article, agency is examined in relation to the existence, accessibility, availability, and use of selected prison spaces, and to the ways in which these spaces are experienced within architectural, institutional, and security-related constraints. To analyze how such constrained agency is shaped in everyday prison life, the article draws on the four interrelated dimensions of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality. These dimensions are understood as conditions through which agency may be supported or undermined, and through which prison spaces may shape rehabilitative processes. The preservation of dignity as a fundamental human right plays a critical role in the treatment of incarcerated individuals and their self-perception. A lack of dignity can erode self-worth, lead to anger and tension, and complicate the reintegration process (Liebling, 2011; Ploch, 2012). Closely linked to dignity is privacy; without it, individuals may experience dehumanization, further undermining their sense of dignity (Kahn, 2003). Autonomy is equally central for rehabilitation; granting incarcerated individuals some amount of independence fosters a sense of control over their lives, which promotes personal responsibility and builds the confidence needed for life after incarceration (Galouzis et al., 2023). Autonomy is also tied to dignity, as evidenced by research showing that the constant need to seek staff permission for minor tasks can be experienced as “humiliating and exhausting,” fostering the perception among incarcerated individuals that they are at the mercy of authority figures (Hofinger & Pflegerl, 2024, p. 906). Finally, allowing incarcerated individuals to engage in everyday activities and routines, and to live under conditions that align with societal norms and somewhat resemble life outside

of prison, fosters a sense of normality within the institution (Van de Rijt et al., 2023a). Establishing such a sense of normality may aid in adjusting to post-release expectations and thus may facilitate a smoother societal transition. However, normalized prison design may also create tensions where architectural features suggest autonomy or homeliness but remain inaccessible due to institutional rules (Marti, 2025).

2. The Austrian Prison Landscape

At the time of the study, Austria maintained 28 custodial institutions categorized into three main types: regional court prisons, which accommodate male and female individuals on remand or serving sentences of up to 18 months; custodial prisons, which house men or women serving sentences exceeding 18 months; and special institutions for individuals with mental illnesses who have committed criminal offenses. As there are no designated high-security prisons in Austria, high-security units or cells are incorporated within these existing institutions. Security is maintained mainly through architectural layout, supervision, and procedural routines, which together provide the framework for implementing rehabilitative and social measures. The architectural landscape of these institutions is significantly shaped by historical buildings, many of which were constructed before 1900, including repurposed monasteries and castles, some dating back to the 11th and 13th centuries. These historic structures pose substantial challenges as they must be adapted to align with contemporary correctional standards while also complying with heritage protection regulations. In addition to the older buildings, Austria's prison landscape includes facilities constructed in the 1970s and some contemporary institutions built within the last 15 years.

This architectural diversity creates a range of operational challenges, necessitating ongoing renovations and adaptations to ensure that all facilities are brought in line with evolving standards of modern prison management and humane detention practices. Some of the more recently constructed prisons reflect a shift in the approach to prison design, moving away from the rigid, compartmentalized layouts of earlier models toward more open and flexible configurations. These contemporary designs emphasize the separation of individuals according to their specific needs and focus on creating environments that are more functional and less restrictive, in line with progressive approaches to incarceration.¹ However, this progressive architectural approach cannot always be put into practice. Austria's prisons currently operate at 108 % of their intended capacity², thus facing challenges related to overcrowding, with several facilities operating beyond their intended capacity. This situation results in a lack of sufficient work opportunities for incarcerated individuals, with an average employment rate of 65 %³ and a typical workday of around three hours, and puts significant strain on available resources. Additionally, the persistent shortage of staff and high rates of sick leave further strain the system (Austrian Court of Audit [ACA], 2024). As a result, even when adequate spaces and facili-

¹ see, e.g. the Leoben Justice and Detention Centre, completed in 2004 (Fikfak et al., 2015).

² Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice. (n.d.). Verteilung des Insassinnen- bzw. Insassenstandes [Distribution of incarcerated individuals].

³ The employment rate in Austrian prisons varies significantly: In 2023, custodial prisons reported employment rates of between 69 % and 94 %, while regional court prisons ranged from 26 % to 72 % (ACA, 2024, p. 37).

ties are available, staffing shortages adversely affect prison operations. Incarcerated individuals may be unable to participate in workshops and other activities, such as yard time, due to insufficient personnel. Furthermore, a lack of available staff in a unit can result in in-cell confinement for extended periods, with up to 23 hours per day reported in several regional court prisons (ACA, 2024; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CPT], 2021).

3. Study Background and Methodology

The outlined diversity creates challenges for maintaining consistent standards across facilities. Thus, the KIRAS-funded⁴ project ‘Efficient, Secure Structural Detention Design in Prisons in Austria’ was initiated to develop evidence-based recommendations for auditable architectural and technical standards in Austrian prisons. These standards were intended to be sustainable, contribute to a healthy prison climate, promote safety and security, and support incarcerated individuals in their rehabilitation. The study followed an interdisciplinary design combining social science with architecture and digital technology. The present article draws on this broader project but pursues a more specific social-scientific analytical focus.

A sample consisting of nine regional court and custodial prisons was selected through theoretical sampling (Strübing, 2022), representing variations in location (rural or urban), size (small: 100-250 people; medium: 251-400; large: 401-660; very large: over 650 people), and construction period (before and after 1945; major reconstructions after 2000). The sampling strategy was intended to capture variation in institutional settings and spatial conditions rather than to produce a statistically representative sample of Austrian prisons.

The methodological approach comprised interviews and focus groups conducted across all nine facilities, complemented by structured on-site visits guided by observation protocols (Prainsack & Pot, 2021). The purpose of the visits was to understand the architectural layout, spatial organization, and functional routines of the facilities while not interfering with the everyday activities of incarcerated individuals and staff. On-site visits included key areas of daily life such as workshops, classrooms, housing units, and cells only if unoccupied or when incarcerated individuals invited entry, as well as sanitary areas, courtyards, and sports facilities. The observation protocols documented spatial layout, accessibility, apparent use, equipment, visibility, supervision requirements, and sensory impressions such as noise, atmosphere, and perceived suitability for the intended use. They were also used in connection with the interview guides, allowing for a better understanding of participants’ references to specific spaces and, where appropriate, to ask follow-up questions about spatial arrangements, access routes, and everyday use. Visits were planned with and accompanied by wardens or commanding officers, with initial access having been granted by the Ministry of Justice. Access to specific areas was therefore institutionally mediated and shaped by security routines, staff availability, and the conditions of the respective facility.

⁴ The Austrian Security Research Programme, KIRAS, is managed by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Austria. It supports national research projects aimed at enhancing the security of all members of society. KIRAS places a strong emphasis on funding initiatives related to the protection of critical infrastructure. Its primary target groups include universities, companies, and research organizations.

To capture diverse perspectives, 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with wardens, correctional officers, heads of economic services, and representatives of psychological and social services. Furthermore, 27 semi-structured interviews were carried out with incarcerated individuals selected according to predefined criteria developed by the research team, including gender, adult age, and familiarity with the respective institution. As movement through and use of prison spaces may differ substantially depending on whether individuals work or not, work status was included as an additional selection criterion. Based on these criteria, information sheets were provided to eligible individuals, who could then indicate whether they were willing to participate in an interview. Interviews with incarcerated individuals took place in visiting areas, classrooms, or, in rare cases, in administrative rooms. These settings, except for the latter, were also discussed during the interviews, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how interviewees perceive and evaluate their physical environment. Staff interviews occurred in administrative areas, which are not accessible to incarcerated individuals. The interviews addressed participants' perceptions of architectural, spatial, design-related, and technology-related conditions in different areas of everyday prison life, including accommodation, education and training, work, leisure activities, outdoor areas, professional services, health care, contact with the outside world, movement through the institution, and digital technologies. They also included questions about perceived facilitators and barriers in everyday prison life, privacy, normality, and suggestions for spatial or organizational improvement. Each interview lasted around one hour and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Additionally, thirteen focus groups, each lasting around two hours, were conducted with staff only, as group discussions with incarcerated individuals were not permitted. Eight were held with correctional officers and five with representatives of psychological and social services to explore professional perspectives on organizational and spatial dynamics, including the everyday use of prison spaces, supervision requirements, and security-related constraints. Interview and focus group participants did not overlap. Participation in the study was voluntary and based on clear information about the study's objectives, data use, and confidentiality. Staff provided written consent, incarcerated individuals gave verbal consent, which was recorded at the start of each interview. The study was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee in accordance with national and university guidelines for research involving human participants.

The collected data were first transcribed and anonymized and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Dresing & Pehl, 2018; Kuckartz et al., 2008; Prainsack & Pot, 2021). Within this approach, participants' accounts were treated as situated perspectives on how prison spaces are perceived, accessed, used, and experienced in everyday institutional practice, rather than as objective assessments of architectural quality. Coding followed a combined deductive and inductive approach. The project objectives and interview guidelines informed initial codes concerning access, availability, spatial use, equipment, sensory impressions, supervision, privacy, security requirements, normality, autonomy, and perceived barriers or facilitators in everyday prison life. At the same time, the coding process remained open to additional themes emerging from the material, most notably dignity. For the purpose of this article, the coded material was analyzed through the four dimensions introduced above, namely dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality, to examine how the use of selected prison spaces may support or constrain agency and thereby shape rehabilitative processes in prison. The interviews with incarcerated individuals and the interviews and focus groups with staff were first analyzed sep-

arately by the two authors and then discussed jointly in order to identify connections, differences, and recurring patterns across participant groups. In the presentation of the findings, these perspectives were brought together thematically. Data gathered from the on-site visits was not treated as a separate data set but was used to contextualize interviews and focus group accounts of spatial arrangements, access routes, equipment, sensory impressions, and everyday use.

4. Multi-Perspective Findings

The findings focus on four types of spaces that emerged across the material as central to everyday institutional life. These are spaces for leisure activities, spaces for counseling, spaces for work and education, and spaces for contact with the outside world. Although these spaces differ in function, they all shape how incarcerated individuals move through the institution, interact with others, access support, and experience degrees of privacy, autonomy, dignity, and normality. The following sections therefore examine how their spatial conditions, institutional routines, and security requirements may contribute to or limit rehabilitative processes in prison.

4.1 Spaces for Leisure Activities

Leisure activities, particularly sports and physical exercise, were repeatedly described by staff and incarcerated individuals alike as playing a significant role in promoting the well-being of incarcerated individuals by helping to break the repetitive nature of prison life and reduce boredom. Their relevance, however, has been shown to extend beyond individual health and occupation. By creating structured opportunities for interaction, such activities can reduce tension, foster relationships among incarcerated individuals as well as between them and staff (Hofinger & Fritsche, 2021; Johnsen, 2018; Liguori & Calella, 2024; Marti, 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2015). These social interactions may also contribute to dynamic security⁵, as they allow staff to gain informal insight into emotional states, identify potential conflicts before they escalate, and support individuals in their daily struggles (Ajil, 2021).

Each of the nine facilities offers a diverse range of activities taking place inside the building, either within units or elsewhere, including chess and theater groups, infrequent movie screenings and concerts, and communal cooking, as well as outside activities such as walking groups for those with low-security status, and various sports such as football, volleyball, and basketball on sports grounds or in the yard. However, the availability, accessibility, quality, and frequency of access to these spaces vary considerably.

In units with designated leisure rooms, these most often take the form of sports or fitness rooms, which incarcerated individuals can access independently when the units are open.

⁵ Dynamic security refers to the concept of continuous interaction and positive relationship-building between prison staff and incarcerated individuals to enhance overall security in prisons, complementing physical and procedural security measures. It represents a more qualitative approach by emphasizing engagement, communication, and understanding, with the aim of building trust and mutual respect – aspects that help prevent incidents and thereby also support rehabilitation (UNODC, 2015).

When such spaces are available and appropriately equipped, they can foster a sense of normality, as one incarcerated individual noted that fitness rooms may be “*smaller than the ones outside, but with good equipment, music, and only one officer around, it almost feels like being outside*” (Incarcerated individual, 27). However, this experience of normality is not shared equally in mixed facilities, where women reported that sports rooms are primarily reserved for men. Women described often having to exercise in corridors or communal rooms within the unit, with the limited space allowing little variation in the type of sport practiced. It was reported, for example, that apart from an exercise bike and light dumbbells, there was nothing comparable to the men’s fitness rooms. While equal access to diverse spaces and equipment can promote inclusivity and break down stereotypes (Düinkel et al., 2005), this lack of it not only limits women’s opportunities for physical health and well-being but also has the potential to undermine their sense of dignity and normality through unequal treatment.

Unequal access became further apparent with regard to outside spaces, illustrated by one woman stating that “*the outdoor sports area in the women’s section is really small*” and that they “*unlike the men’s units [...] don’t have a proper yard or comparable facilities*” (Incarcerated individual, 21). Outdoor spaces, however, are relevant not only for sport and movement. As they provide access to fresh air, daylight, and, ideally, nature, these spaces create a qualitatively different atmosphere from the enclosed prison spaces, thereby reducing aggression and offering meaningful uses such as recreation, exercise, rest, and relaxation (McDonnell, 2019; Wener, 2012). However, incarcerated individuals repeatedly pointed to outdoor spaces made of concrete, with few opportunities to shelter from sun or rain, little access to nature, and little room for movement. Such spaces reportedly lead to stress, frustration, and poor physical and mental health and also mean that some incarcerated individuals prefer to stay in their cell or unit rather than make use of their hour of yard time.

A further challenge concerns the fact that the mere existence of spaces for leisure and physical activity is insufficient if these spaces are difficult to access. In several facilities, existing rooms were located in remote parts of the building or premises, which limited their usability. One officer, for example, described that although the facility now had a “*brand-new, perfectly equipped sports room,*” it was “*a bit out of the way,*” and thus “*hardly anyone uses [it]*” (Officer, 84). Incarcerated individuals similarly described how remote locations affected their autonomy, as they could neither access these spaces independently nor engage spontaneously in physical activity or social interaction. When access is no longer a matter of personal choice but depends on staff availability and logistical feasibility, spatial arrangements further reinforce the disempowering nature of incarceration.

In older buildings that were not originally designed as prisons, on-site visits also showed clear differences between individual units, with some offering more dedicated spaces than others. In order to make these spaces more equally available, staff explained that they sometimes accompany incarcerated individuals to another unit, for example to use a kitchen for communal cooking. This practice, however, reportedly causes disruptions and complicates workflows, a concern staff framed primarily in logistical and security terms, while incarcerated individuals emphasized the resulting loss of choice.

However, such designated spaces, whether indoors or outdoors, could not be identified in each of the nine facilities. Particularly in the above-mentioned older facilities, available rooms on the units often function as multipurpose spaces. As incarcerated individuals can usually access them only during limited periods of free movement, different activities such as cooking, social gatherings, smoking, and physical exercise tend to be concentrated in the same room and time

window. The mix of different smells and noises has been described as an issue, in some cases to the extent that incarcerated individuals raised health concerns. Similar to the yard, some incarcerated individuals therefore choose not to use the room anymore, further restricting their already limited autonomous movement. Access becomes even more restricted when staff also need to use these rooms for support work with individuals. As a result, availability becomes even more unpredictable and conflicts over use can arise. One psychologist described this as “*unpleasant*,” explaining that incarcerated individuals may be using the room during their free time as “*naturally they want to play their games*,” but they⁶ then have to interrupt them and ask everyone to leave because “*I need the room*” (Psychologist, 11).

Overall, while spaces for leisure and physical activity can support autonomy, dignity, health, and a sense of normality, for them to do so, they require fair distribution, access and appropriate equipment. Unequal access, especially between men and women, remote locations, poorly designed outdoor areas, and multipurpose rooms limit these benefits and can discourage incarcerated individuals from using available spaces. Leisure spaces should therefore be sufficiently available, clearly designated, well distributed across units, and accessible with minimal dependence on staff escort. They should be conveniently located, well equipped, and designed as “truly normalized environments” (Hoffs, 2014, p. 11), with outdoor areas providing enough space for movement, shelter from weather, and greenery. Following staff suggestions, modern workout facilities such as calisthenics equipment could further improve opportunities for outdoor physical activity.

4.2 Spaces for Counseling

Across the nine facilities, staff and incarcerated individuals repeatedly linked the quality of psychological and social support to the location, privacy, equipment, and atmosphere of counseling spaces. This corresponds with research showing that appropriate and undisturbed spaces can enhance the effectiveness of psychological and social interventions within prisons (St. John et al., 2019). In the present analysis, the availability of suitable counseling spaces is therefore not only a functional requirement, but also a condition for protecting incarcerated individuals’ privacy and enabling confidential interaction with social workers and psychologists. Yet this availability itself proved to be a central challenge, with staff and incarcerated individuals repeatedly describing a lack of clearly designated rooms for confidential consultations within units or elsewhere in the facility. As a result, counseling frequently takes place in improvised settings, including communal areas, corridors, or at cell doors, either when they are open or through the meal hatch. Communication through such hatches is particularly relevant for dignity, as incarcerated individuals have described it as degrading and dehumanizing (Hofinger & Fritsche, 2021). At the same time, privacy is difficult to protect in such improvised settings, and confidential counseling becomes harder to sustain, as one incarcerated individual observed that “*in the corridor, everyone hears everything*” (Incarcerated individual, 15).

In prisons where designated rooms are available, staff pointed to a tension between the greater privacy and confidentiality these rooms provide and the security concerns they have experienced. One psychologist described this ambivalence by noting that a “*small and carefully adapted room may feel cozy and help build trust*,” while it can also “*make it harder to keep*

⁶ All participants are referred to using gender-neutral pronouns (they/them) to protect anonymity.

physical distance” (Psychologist, 32). A similar tension was described when counseling rooms are equipped with windows in the door. While these windows can reportedly enhance some staff members’ sense of security, incarcerated individuals emphasized that, although they are aware of the security aspect, they perceive these windows as interfering with the quality of their sessions. As one incarcerated individual explained, *“you don’t really feel comfortable, because through the glass you see others waiting and knocking”* (Incarcerated individual, 07). In this way, visibility, waiting arrangements, and interruptions can undermine the sense of privacy required for confidential counseling, even when confidentiality is formally protected by the setting. To address this tension, some staff suggested spatial and technical measures that could protect privacy while maintaining a secure environment, including the strategic placement of rooms near officers’ staff rooms within the unit and, where appropriate, of CCTV. However, CCTV can also increase control and self-surveillance among incarcerated individuals by reducing their sense of privacy, and its use should therefore be considered carefully (Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022; Moran & Jewkes, 2015).

Beyond questions of availability, privacy, and security, staff also identified the importance of the overall atmosphere and equipment of counseling rooms. One psychologist described how they and their colleagues had adapted a counseling room that initially consisted only of *“a table and a computer”* by making it *“more welcoming with pictures and decorations”* (Psychologist, 32). This resonates with accounts of incarcerated individuals, with one stating that *“several of us noticed how much difference a pleasant room can make.”* Their reference to *“the scent, the wooden floor, the atmosphere”* and to being able to *“relax and process things”* (Incarcerated individual, 11) shows how material and sensory qualities can make counseling spaces feel less institutional and more respectful, and thereby potentially support experiences of dignity and normality. Additionally, designated rooms are reported to be most effective when equipped according to their intended purpose. Staff emphasized the importance of secure document storage, access to technological tools for documentation and translation, and the availability of video interpretation services. Translation tools and video interpretation services are considered particularly relevant given the high proportion of foreign nationals in Austrian prisons⁷, who may be at greater risk of disadvantage due to language barriers.

Ideally, designated rooms should be provided within a unit to ensure easy, independent access for incarcerated individuals, thereby fostering a sense of autonomy and normality (Galouzis et al., 2023). At the same time, their location and design need to take staff concerns about safety and supervision into account without undermining privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, a separate space away from the unit may be useful for group therapy or extended individual appointments, as on-site visits indicated that counseling rooms within the units were often too small for these purposes. Ensuring the availability of well-equipped and strategically located spaces that balance privacy and security can therefore be seen as an important condition for strengthening the overall effectiveness of psychological and social services in prisons, and thus positively influence rehabilitation efforts.

⁷ Compared to the EU average of 27 % incarcerated foreigners in prisons, Austria has a significantly higher share, regularly exceeding 50 % (Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics, 2023, p. 8).

4.3 Spaces for Work and Education

A primary motivation for engaging in work, education, and training is earning an income and having something to do that alleviates the restrictive nature of confinement, as emphasized by both staff and incarcerated individuals. Moreover, the provision of these activities aims to develop practical and social skills and establish professional connections, with the intention of increasing chances of successful (re-)integration into the labor market after release (Van de Rijt et al., 2023b). Engaging in these activities provides a structured daily routine and keeps incarcerated individuals purposefully engaged, thereby contributing to the maintenance of institutional order and security (Guilbaud, 2010; Marti, 2023), as illustrated by the statement of a correctional officer that *“if we don’t keep the prisoners busy, they’ll keep us busy”* (Officer, 12).

According to Austrian law, physically capable incarcerated individuals are required to work, although the legislation does not specify the type or duration of labor.⁸ In practice, this usually means working in a prison workshop in which items are manufactured for external companies, performing maintenance tasks, or participating in education and training programs. Exceptions apply for certain groups, such as individuals on remand in regional court prisons.

The recurring issue on the rehabilitative potential of work and education was whether the spatial and organizational conditions are fit for purpose and allow meaningful participation. In the facilities visited, particularly in older buildings, existing workshops and classrooms are often too few and inadequately equipped. One incarcerated trained mechanic described the prison workshop as *“pretty outdated, too small and too low to lift cars high enough to work standing underneath”* (Incarcerated individual, 22). They further noted that the available equipment is *“not comparable to modern facilities outside”* (Incarcerated individual, 22), primarily due to the absence of computers and electronic equipment. Moreover, workshops that are stuffy due to inadequate ventilation and lacking access to fresh air have been described as affecting not only physical well-being but also the overall work atmosphere. Where conditions are more favorable, however, the picture is different. One correctional officer described how a well-developed internal workshop structure can enable substantive work, noting that *“our great advantage is that we have a very good operational structure with 18 different workshops. This allows us to work much more individually than others”* (Officer, 21). Thus, the rehabilitative value of prison work may depend, at least in part, on whether workshops resemble normal working environments outside prison. Where spatial conditions, equipment, and working practices reflect current workplace standards, training is more likely to provide skills that remain relevant after release.

While the example illustrates that diverse work is possible where conditions allow, organizational factors often constrain its broader realization. An identified challenge lies in aligning programs with the prevailing low skill and educational levels of a rising number of incarcerated individuals. According to staff, work opportunities are already limited *“to really low-threshold work because the prison population is much less educated than it was 20 years ago”* (Officer, 08).⁹

Education faces similar organizational challenges. There is a reported lack of programs tailored to incarcerated individuals with learning difficulties. Poorly matched programs can lead to a

⁸ Section 44(1), Austrian Correctional Services Act (Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice, 1969).

⁹ Numbers on the educational background of incarcerated individuals can be found in the various security reports (2018–2022) published by the Federal Ministry of Justice.

lack of achievement and subsequent frustration, reducing participation and causing early dropout – and thus preventing the development of competencies necessary for reintegration into the labor market after release.

The shortage of staff available to supervise, instruct, or directly support exacerbates the problem in both areas, at times preventing work and education activities from taking place at all – and thus hindering the development of professional and social skills. Yet where staff are present, incarcerated individuals emphasized that work environments can foster good relationships, as one noted, *“the bosses are great – truly two kind-hearted people who really helped me a lot in this house”* (Incarcerated individual, 03).

In facilities holding both men and women, joint work assignments are possible in principle but remain rare in practice. As a result of this separation, women reported particular disadvantages in access to work, with workspaces often limited to their housing units and tasks largely confined to stereotypical activities such as laundry, ironing, and sewing. As one correctional officer noted, *“women don’t have nearly as many opportunities as men, and they certainly can’t pursue careers in the same way”* (Officer, 12).

Classroom facilities are similarly often out of reach, as accessing them would sometimes require passing through male units, which is considered logistically and security-wise difficult. These spatial arrangements also restrict movement. Women who cannot access workshops or classrooms outside their unit are confined to a significantly smaller institutional world, shaping how work is experienced in everyday life and potentially undermining their sense of autonomy and dignity.

To unlock the rehabilitative potential of work and education spaces, workshops should be modernized, and rooms should be designed to support low-threshold programs that enable participation. Introducing supervised mixed-gender work assignments could further promote gender equity and broaden skill development. However, such arrangements require increased supervision and are therefore rarely implemented in practice. One officer remarked, *“you can’t leave them alone in the workshops, not even for a moment to get the mail”* (Officer, 51), reflecting staff concerns about potential incidents or prohibited intimate interactions.

In the context of education, digitalization offers promising solutions to ease spatial and staffing limitations. Providing incarcerated individuals with secure laptops or tablets for access to educational platforms can expand learning opportunities beyond the confines of physical classrooms and support reintegration prospects (Hofinger & Pflegerl, 2024; Rantanen et al., 2021). Ensuring the necessary technical infrastructure, including cabling, should therefore be addressed, particularly in older facilities.

4.4 Spaces for Contact With the Outside World

Contact with family members and friends outside prison is maintained primarily through in-person visits, telephone calls, and video calls, yet these forms of contact reportedly differ considerably in terms of accessibility, privacy, spatial arrangement, and everyday use. Given its importance for rehabilitation, emotional support during imprisonment, and reintegration after release (Galouzis et al., 2023; International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2023), these differences are particularly relevant.

In Austria, visits are possible in the form of conjugal visits, in-person visits, and non-contact in-person visits, whose design, structure, and monitoring not only shape the frequency and

quality of visits but also how they are experienced by incarcerated individuals and their visitors (see also Bernheimer et al., 2017; Cochran & Mears, 2013). Conjugal visits and the spaces in which they take place are highly valued by interviewed incarcerated individuals, primarily for the comfort, privacy, and normality they provide. Often resembling small apartments, these spaces offer a home-like environment for uninterrupted and genuine interaction. As one incarcerated individual explained, *“the important thing is simply to have some privacy, that no officer is standing next to you, that you can talk, that you can hug, just those things”* (Incarcerated individual, 14). Such rare moments of privacy can help maintain emotional connection and intimacy that might counterbalance the isolating conditions of imprisonment. However, conjugal visits are challenging to access due to strict requirements and limited availability, with many facilities offering only one room and long waiting lists. This scarcity was also emphasized by staff, with one officer noting that these visits *“really help to ease the pressure”* for incarcerated individuals serving long sentences, but that *“we need the rooms for other things”* (Officer, 83).

In-person visits, which are more common, offer slightly more personal interaction than non-contact visits behind glass. Incarcerated individuals repeatedly welcomed the possibility of some limited physical contact, such as handshakes or brief hugs. However, the lack of privacy was mentioned as a frequent concern. The closely arranged tables, combined with the presence of officers, fellow incarcerated individuals, and their visitors, reportedly leads to a heightened noise level, reducing the quality of visits and making communication difficult.

A positive aspect observed in some visitation rooms was the presence of play areas. However, incarcerated individuals pointed out that the toys are limited and mainly intended for very young children, highlighting a need for more variety. More generally, they described the environment as not suitable for children, with spatial conditions, noise, lack of privacy, security routines, and emotional strain making visits difficult for their children and themselves. Accounts from parents who decided that their children should no longer visit vividly illustrate how these conditions can affect parent–child relationships and make family ties harder to preserve during incarceration. Thus, both the visitation spaces and the overall visitation process could benefit from a more child-friendly design, supporting efforts to prevent children from experiencing a form of secondary prisonization¹⁰ (Aiello & McCorkel, 2018).

Telephone access presents a second set of challenges. Typically situated in shared spaces such as corridors, courtyards, and communal areas, and either wall-mounted or placed in open phone booths, telephones offer little privacy and make confidential communication difficult. One incarcerated individual described this situation as *“unacceptable,”* explaining that *“people are listening, talking in the corridor,”* making it difficult to *“discuss anything personal without wondering who might hear it”* (Incarcerated individual, 14). The limited availability of telephones was similarly described as a broader problem by several incarcerated individuals. One interviewee illustrated this by explaining how *“stressful”* a call becomes *with “forty people in the unit and only one hour”* (Incarcerated individual, 19). As a result, individuals often have to queue for telephones, contributing to tensions among them. The combination of device shortages and restricted time slots for phone use further complicates timely communication, as possibilities to connect often do not align with the schedules of those outside. This restricted access strains personal relationships and hinders consistent and relatively normal contact with

¹⁰ Secondary prisonization describes how the routines, restrictions, and emotional burdens of incarceration may extend to incarcerated individuals’ families and friends, despite them not being imprisoned themselves (Aiello & McCorkel, 2018).

support systems, as evidenced by incarcerated individuals frequently mentioning their inability to reach anyone during designated phone hours. One newer facility visited, however, offers a progressive approach, having installed telephones directly in some cells, which could serve as a model for other prisons.

Finally, video calling was identified as a key area for improvement for expanding contact opportunities, particularly for incarcerated individuals whose friends or family members live too far away for regular in-person visits. Officers further pointed out its potential organizational benefits, as court appointments could be conducted via video conferencing, meaning that they would not *“have to go to court every time,”* which was described as *“very staff-intensive”* (Officer, 83) and as further straining already limited resources. However, replacing physical presence in court with video conferencing needs to be considered alongside possible implications for incarcerated individuals’ fundamental and procedural rights (McKay & Macintosh, 2024). With regard to limited resources, video calling does not necessarily require a separate dedicated room, yet it depends on technical and structural infrastructure that may be difficult to install in older, heritage-protected buildings.

To address incarcerated individuals’ *“strong need for more communication with their families”* (Hofinger & Pflegerl, 2024, p. 908) and thereby support the maintenance of relationships, contact options should be expanded while privacy and confidentiality are taken into account, call durations extended, and telephone call costs reduced, thereby creating a mediated space that complements and, to some extent, may compensate for limited physical visitation.

5. Discussion

This article discusses how the built environment of prisons, including its organization, accessibility, and usability, shapes daily life and work within correctional institutions and relates to experiences of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality in everyday prison life. These four dimensions were developed and refined through the combined deductive and inductive analytical process. Although they are not always easily distinguishable, together they provide a framework for discussing how prison spaces potentially impact experiences of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality in ways that can support or constrain rehabilitative processes.

The study’s use of multiple perspectives, incorporating insights from incarcerated individuals and prison staff and complemented by observations from structured on-site visits, suggests how spatial and organizational factors interact to enable or constrain agency and well-being. While each prison space examined serves a distinct function, its relevance for rehabilitation depends not only on its physical characteristics but also on its usability, accessibility, and integration into the broader institutional structure.

A key finding concerns the discrepancy between the accessibility and usability of available spaces. Although incarcerated individuals and staff recognize the existence of certain spaces, these areas are frequently described as inaccessible because of their remote location. Providing access would require additional security measures, which in practice often limit their use to specific groups, for example for those with lower security status. Moreover, limited usability frequently results from the reliance on multipurpose rooms, a common response to overcrowding or historically determined layouts. While spatial constraints make flexibility necessary, the repurposing of communal areas for therapy, social interaction, or physical activity reportedly generates conflicts over availability and compromises privacy, confidentiality, and security

(ICRC, 2023; Wener, 2012). In addition to their practical functions, these spatial arrangements point to the ways in which access to space is often organized according to institutional hierarchies, where decisions about who can use which areas reflect and reinforce distinctions between incarcerated individuals and staff. For example, when a common room – originally intended as a leisure area for incarcerated individuals – is temporarily taken over by staff for counseling sessions or other purposes, the shift in usage can reveal underlying power dynamics. While such reallocations usually result from a general shortage of space, they might also be framed as necessary for security, for instance to restrict the movement of incarcerated individuals or to ensure staff safety. This suggests how security shapes spatial organization, often coming into tension with the principles of dignity, privacy, autonomy, and normality. The findings of this article therefore suggest that an overemphasis on restrictive measures, although grounded in legitimate security concerns, may ultimately undermine efforts to create a humane and rehabilitative environment that is equally accessible (see also Van de Rijt et al., 2023b). Efficient use of space is therefore indispensable, yet it needs to be accompanied by designated rooms for specific purposes to safeguard security and rehabilitation.

Across the four spaces examined, the findings point to a recurring tension between formal provision and everyday usability. This tension becomes visible in how these spaces are accessed, used, equipped, and organizationally embedded in everyday institutional practice. Leisure spaces were described as relevant for well-being, social interaction, normality, and dynamic security, but their use was often shaped by location, staff resources, security status, and competing room functions. Counseling spaces point to the importance of confidentiality, dignity, trust, atmosphere, and appropriate equipment, while also showing that privacy and staff safety have to be considered together. Work and education spaces suggest that prison labor and learning may lose part of their normalizing and reintegrative potential when workshops and classrooms are outdated, poorly equipped, insufficiently accessible, or unavailable to particular groups, especially women. Spaces and infrastructures for contact with the outside world indicate that visits, telephone calls, and video communication are important conditions for maintaining family relationships, emotional support, and reintegration prospects. Across these domains, spaces that are formally intended to support rehabilitation may fail to do so when access is restricted, privacy is compromised, equipment is inadequate, or security routines override everyday usability. Conversely, spatial or organizational improvements may strengthen dignity, autonomy, normality, and supportive relationships when they make prison spaces more accessible and responsive to the needs of different groups of incarcerated individuals.

In this context, digitalization may offer responses to spatial constraints, particularly through the integration of video communication. Empirically, incarcerated individuals and staff described video telephony as an important means of maintaining family contact where physical visits were limited, especially for foreign nationals or those detained far from home. Digital access could further contribute to rehabilitation by providing secure laptops or tablets for educational purposes and by integrating in-cell technology that allows access to entertainment (Hofinger & Pflegerl, 2024; Zaviani & Mahlangu, 2022). Such measures may help alleviate monotony and boredom during prolonged cell confinement while reducing demand for communal spaces. Moreover, ensuring digital inclusion can help foster digital skills and represents a step toward promoting equal opportunities in the digital age (Rantanen et al., 2021). However, while existing research suggests that access to digital learning platforms and communication tools can enhance incarcerated individuals' well-being and autonomy, these tools have clear

limitations and should supplement rather than replace personal interaction with staff (Barkworth et al., 2022; Hofinger & Pflegerl, 2024).

A persistent challenge identified in the study is the architectural heterogeneity of Austrian prisons. Historical facilities, often located in former monasteries or castles, present specific challenges that contemporary correctional buildings do not face. New constructions, by contrast, can offer greater flexibility in terms of design, light, ventilation, and temperature regulation (Long et al., 2011). However, older facilities are less frequently considered in the literature, which tends to focus on modern examples such as Norway's well-known Halden Prison, and might therefore overlook the unique complexities and constraints of adapting historical structures (John, 2018; Marti, 2025). While modern facilities provide valuable insights and represent important advancements, it is equally important to recognize that many correctional systems continue to rely on existing infrastructure. Therefore, attention should also be given to how existing, often historically protected buildings can be improved, even within their limited scope. The article suggests that architectural quality alone does not determine prison conditions. Small architectural interventions, such as interior design, decoration, or the use of color, may contribute to a more balanced environment even within historical buildings.

The findings further support the claim that it is the interplay between architecture and design, organizational practices, and interpersonal dynamics that can foster dynamic security and normalization during imprisonment, thereby influencing rehabilitation outcomes (Ajil, 2021; Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022; Hoffs, 2014; John, 2018; UNODC, 2015). Consequently, a well-managed older facility may offer better rehabilitative opportunities than a poorly managed modern one. A universal "one-size-fits-all" approach is thus insufficient (Nadel & Mears, 2020).

Furthermore, different groups of incarcerated individuals, categorized e.g. by gender, age, security level, nationality, and sentence length, need to be considered when developing appropriate measures for prison design and organization, an aspect that could not be fully addressed in this article. Nonetheless, in line with other scholars, the authors emphasize that while thoughtfully designed prisons prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment may appear more humane, such designs do not necessarily result in humane imprisonment. On the contrary, they may inadvertently justify rising incarceration rates and the expansion of prison infrastructure, while obscuring the inherent suffering associated with coercive confinement (Brottveit, 2018; Jewkes et al., 2023). Ultimately, it is important that the conditions of imprisonment do not exacerbate the deprivation of liberty, which must remain a measure of last resort. The punishment should lie in the loss of freedom itself, not in the conditions under which it is imposed, no matter how humane they may seem.

6. Conclusion

This article contributes to the international discussion on prison architecture by showing that accessibility and usability, rather than spatial design alone, are key factors shaping the potential for rehabilitation. It seeks to improve understanding of how the material and organizational aspects of imprisonment influence everyday experiences. The findings highlight that humane and rehabilitative environments depend not only on design features but also on how design and management practices interact in daily operation. Future research should examine how specific design features affect different groups within prison populations, particularly

women, young people, older people, and foreign nationals, to ensure that rehabilitation is fair and effective.

References

- Aiello, B. L., & McCorkel, J. A. (2018). 'It will crush you like a bug': Maternal incarceration, secondary prisonization, and children's visitation. *Punishment & Society*, 20(3), 351-374.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474517697295>
- Ajil, A. (2021). Dynamische Sicherheit im Freiheitsentzug [Dynamic security in detention]. Schweizerisches Kompetenzzentrum für den Justizvollzug SKJV. (German only).
<https://www.skjv.ch/de/unsere-dienstleistungen/publikationen>
- Austrian Court of Audit. (2024). Report on resocialisation measures by the judiciary (German only).
https://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/rh/home/home/2024_8_Resozialisierung_Justiz.pdf
- Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice. (n.d.). Verteilung des Insassinnen- bzw. Insassenstandes [Distribution of incarcerated individuals]. Retrieved March 2025, from <https://www.justiz.gv.at/strafvollzug/statistik/verteilung-des-insassinnen-bzw-insassen-standes.2c94848542ec49810144457e2e6f3de9.de.html>
- Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice. (1969). Strafvollzugsgesetz [Correctional Services Act], BGBl. Nr. 144/1969. <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002135>
- Barkworth, J., Thaler, O. & Howard, M. (2022). Implementing digital technologies in prisons: Inmate uptake and perceived value of in-cell digital tablets. *Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics, Research Bulletin No. 54*. <https://correctiveservices.dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/research-and-statistics/rb54-implementing-digital-technologies-in-prisons2.pdf>
- Barton, J., & Pretty, J. (2010). What is the best dose of nature and green exercise for improving mental health? A multi-study analysis. *Environmental Science & Technology*, 44(10), 3947-3955.
<https://doi.org/10.1021/es903183r>
- Beijersbergen, K. A., Dirkzwager, A. J. E., van der Laan, P. H., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2016). A social building? Prison architecture and staff-prisoner relationships. *Crime & Delinquency*, 62(7), 843-874. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128714530657>
- Bernheimer, L., O'Brien, R., & Barnes, R. (2017). Wellbeing in prison design. A guide. www.researchgate.net/profile/Lily-Bernheimer/publication/332569906_Wellbeing_in_Prison_Design_A_Guide/links/5cbe5be94585156cd7ab59be/Wellbeing-in-Prison-Design-A-Guide.pdf
- Brottveit, G. (2018). The becoming of punishment as an unpredictable and moveable torment. In E. Fransson, F. Giofrè, & B. Johnsen (Eds.), *Prison, architecture and humans* (pp. 201-223). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/id/c9ecf7a4-b246-43d4-b96b-895112555cdf/641874.pdf>
- Cochran, J. C. & Mears, D. P. (2013), Social isolation and inmate behavior. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 41(4), S. 252-261. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047235213000330>
- Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics (2023): Key Findings of the SPACE reports.
<https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-ii/annual-reports/>
- Cox, V. C., Paulus, P. B., & McCain, G. (1984). Prison crowding research: The relevance for prison housing standards and a general approach regarding crowding phenomena. *American Psychologist*, 39(10), 1148-1160.
- Dresing, T., & Pehl, T. (2018). Praxisbuch Interview, Transkription & Analyse: Anleitungen und Regelsysteme für qualitativ Forschende [Interview, transcription & analysis practice book: Instructions and rule systems for qualitative researchers] (8th Edition). Self-published. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnribpcajpcglcfindmkaj/https://www.audiotranskription.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Praxisbuch_o8_o1_web.pdf](https://efaidnbmnribpcajpcglcfindmkaj/https://www.audiotranskription.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Praxisbuch_o8_o1_web.pdf)

- Drexler, K., & Weger, T. (2022). Strafvollzugsgesetz: StVG: samt den wichtigsten, den Strafvollzug betreffenden Bestimmungen in anderen Gesetzen und Verordnungen unter Berücksichtigung der höchstgerichtlichen Judikatur und der wichtigsten Literatur (5. Aufl.). MANZ.
- Dünkel, F., Kestermann, C., & Zolondek, J. (2005). Internationale Studie zum Frauenstrafvollzug: Bestandsaufnahme, Bedarfsanalyse und „best practice“ [International study on women's imprisonment: Status quo, analysis of needs, and best practices]. Reader des AGIS Programm, Universität Greifswald. https://rsf.uni-greifswald.de/storages/uni-greifswald/fakultaet/rsf/lehre/lehre/ls-duenkel/Reader_frauenvollzug.pdf
- Engstrom, K. V., & van Ginneken, E. F. J. C. (2023). What is ethical prison architecture? An exploration of prison design and wellbeing. *Prison Service Journal*, 267, 29-37. <https://www.crime-andjustice.org.uk/prison-service-journal-267>
- Engstrom, K. V., & van Ginneken, E. F. J. C. (2022). Ethical prison architecture: A systematic literature review of prison design features related to wellbeing. *Space and Culture*, 25(3), 479-503. <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/3443693>
- European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. (2021). Report on its 2021 visit to Austria. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-publishes-report-on-its-2021-visit-to-austria>
- Evans, G. W. (2003). The built environment and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health*, 4(80), 536-555. <http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/resources/the-built-environment-and-mental-health.pdf>
- Farrington, D. P., & Nuttall, C. P. (1980). Prison size, overcrowding, prison violence, and recidivism. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 8, 221-231. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0047235280900021>
- Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice. (n.d.) Sicherheitsberichte [Security reports]. Retrieved September 24, 2026, from <https://www.justiz.gv.at/justiz/daten-und-fakten/sicherheitsberichte.bc7.de.html>
- Fikfak, A., Kosanovic, S., Crnic, M., & Perovic, V. (2015). The contemporary model of prison architecture: Spatial response to the re-socialization programme. *Spatium*, 34, 27-34. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SPAT1534027F>
- Foucault, M. (1979). Überwachen und Strafe: Die Geburt des Gefängnisses. [Discipline & Punish: The birth of the prison] (3rd ed.). Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Frontczak, M., & Wargocki, P. (2011). Literature survey on how different factors influence human comfort in indoor environments. *Building and Environment*, 46(4), 922-937. www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360132310003136
- Galouzis, J., Day, A., Ross, S., & John, D. (2023). Designing a rehabilitative prison environment. In D. Moran, Y. Jewkes, K.-L. Blount-Hill, & V. St. John (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of prison design* (pp. 385-410).
- Guilbaud, F. (2010). Working in prison: Time as experienced by inmate-workers. *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 51, 41-68. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfs.515.0041>
- Hoffs, B. A. M. (2014). Begin again: New prison design which supports the process of rehabilitation. Graduation Thesis, Eindhoven University of Technology.
- Hofinger, V., & Pfliegerl, P. (2024). A reality check on the digitalisation of prisons: Assessing the opportunities and risks of providing digital technologies for prisoners. *Punishment and Society*, 898-916. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14624745241237190>
- Hofinger, V., & Fritsche, A. (2021). Gewalt in Haft: Ergebnisse einer Dunkelfeldstudie in Österreichs Justizanstalten [Violence in prison: Results of a dark figure study in Austrian prisons]. LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG. https://www.uibk.ac.at/irks/publikationen/2021/pdf/gewalt_in_haft_e-book.pdf
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2023). Prison maintenance guide: Challenges and principles of prison maintenance. <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4641-guide-de-la-maintenance-des-prisons>

- Ireland, J. L., & Culpin, V. (2006). The relationship between sleeping problems and aggression, anger, and impulsivity in a population of juvenile and young offenders. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 649-655. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X05002958>
- Irwin, J., & Owen, B. (2005). Harm and the contemporary prison. In A. Liebling & S. Maruna (Eds.), *The effects of imprisonment* (pp. 94-117). Routledge.
- Jewkes, Y., Moran, D., Blount-Hill, K.-L., & St. John, V. (2023). Introduction. In D. Moran, Y. Jewkes, K.-L. Blount-Hill, & V. St. John (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of prison design* (pp. 1-18).
- Jewkes, Y. (2018). Just design: Healthy prisons and the architecture of hope. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 51(3), 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865818766768>
- John, K. (2018). Humanity Rather than Materialism — A Short Essay About the Prison Environment. In E. Fransson, F. Giofrè, & B. Johnsen (Eds.), *Prison architecture and humans* (p. 29-35). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.31>
- Johnsen, B., Granheim, P. K., & Helgesen, J. (2014). Exceptional prison conditions and the quality of prison life: Prison size and prison culture in Norwegian closed prisons. *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), 515-529. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370811413819> (Original work published 2011)
- Johnsen, B. (2018). Movement in the prison landscape: Leisure activities — inside, outside, and in-between. In E. Fransson, F. Giofrè, & B. Johnsen (Eds.), *Prison architecture and humans* (pp. 65-85). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.31>
- Johnston, N. (2009). Evolving function: Early use of imprisonment as punishment. *The Prison Journal*, 89(1), 10S-34S. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0032885508329761?cid=int.sj-abstract.similar-articles.2>
- Kahn, J. (2003). Privacy as legal principle of identity maintenance. *Seton Hall Law Review*, 33, 371-410. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/shlr33&div=18&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals
- Austrian Research Promotion Agency. (n.d.). KIRAS security research: The Austrian security research programme. KIRAS. Retrieved September 24, 2026, from <https://www.kiras.at/en/home/>
- Kuckartz, U., Dresing, T., Rädiker, S., & Stefer, C. (2008). Qualitative Evaluation [Qualitative evaluation]. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91083-3>
- Liebling, A. (2011). Moral performance, inhuman and degrading treatment and prison pain. *Punishment & Society*, 13(5), 530-550. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1462474511422159>
- Liguori, F., & Calella, P. (2024). Physical activity and wellbeing in prisoners: a scoping review. *International Journal of Prison Health*, ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOPH-07-2024-0038>
- Long, C. G., Langford, V., Clay, R., Craig, L. & Hollin, C. R. (2011). Architectural change and the effects on the perceptions of the ward environment in a medium secure unit for women. *British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 13(3), 205-212.
- Marti, I. (2025). Architecture, atmospheres, and the pains of unattainable affordances: Tracing prisoners' lived experience in a 'new-generation' prison in Switzerland. *Punishment & Society*, 27(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745251336391>
- Marti, I. (2023). *Doing indefinite time. An ethnography of long-term imprisonment in Switzerland*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- McDonnell, T., Hilltorp, M., Evans, A., & Leusink, D. (2019). Designing for rehabilitation. EuroPris Real Estate Expert Group. https://www.euopris.org/wp-content/uploads/ep_library/Designing-for-Rehabilitation-report-2.pdf
- McKay, C., & Macintosh, K. (2024). Digital vulnerability: People-in-prison, videoconferencing and the digital criminal justice system. *Journal of Criminology*, 57(3), 313-333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26338076231217794>
- Moore, E. O. (1981). A prison environment's effect on health care service demands. *Journal of Environmental Systems*, 11(1), 17-34. https://access.portico.org/Portico/show?content=E-Journal%20Content&cs=ISSN_00472433&auId=ark%3A%2F27927%2Fpgk5swmsn4&au-ViewType1=PDF

- Moran, D., Jordaan, J. A. & Jones, P. I. (2023) Greenspace in prison improves well-being irrespective of prison/er characteristics, with particularly beneficial effects for younger and unsentenced prisoners, and in overcrowded prisons. *European Journal of Criminology*, 21(2), 301-325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708231186302>
- Moran, D. (2015). *Carceral geography. Spaces and practices of incarceration*. Routledge.
- Moran, D., & Jewkes, Y. (2015). Linking the carceral and the punitive state: A review of research on prison architecture, design, technology and the lived experience of carceral space. *Annales de Géographie*, 163-184. www.jstor.org/stable/24570140
- Nadel, M. R., & Mears, D. P. (2020). Building with no end in sight: the theory and effects of prison architecture. *Corrections*, 5(3), 188-205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23774657.2018.1461036>
- Ploch, A. (2012). Why dignity matters: Dignity and the right (or not) to rehabilitation from international and national perspectives. *N.Y.U. Journal of International Law and Politics*, 44, 887-949. https://nschaeфыujlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/44-3_Ploch_Web.pdf
- Prainsack, B., & Pot, M. (2021). *Qualitative und interpretative Methoden in der Politikwissenschaft [Qualitative and interpretative methods in political science]*. Facultas.
- Rantanen, T., Järveläinen, E., & Leppälahti, T. (2021). Prisoners as users of digital health care and social welfare services: A Finnish attitude survey. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(11), 5528. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115528>
- Rubin, A. T. (2023). That time we tried to build the perfect prison: Learning from episodes across U.S. prison history. In D. Moran, Y. Jewkes, K.-L. Blount-Hill, & V. St. John (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of prison design* (pp. 21-50).
- Seelich, A. (2009). *Handbuch Strafvollzugsarchitektur: Parameter zeitgemäßer Gefängnisplanung [Handbook on prison architecture: Parameters of contemporary prison planning]* (1st ed.). Springer.
- Stansfeld, S. A., & Matheson, M. P. (2003). Noise pollution: Non-auditory effects on health. *British Medical Bulletin*, 68(1), 243-257. <https://aca-demic.oup.com/bmb/article/68/1/243/421340>.
- Strübing, J. (2022). Grounded Theory und Theoretical Sampling [Grounded theory and theoretical sampling]. In Baur, N. & Blasius, J. (Eds.), *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (pp. 587-606). Springer VS Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-37985-8>
- St. John, V. J., Blount-Hill, K.-L., Evans, D., Ayers, D., & Allard, S. (2019). Architectural and correctional services: A facilities approach to treatment. *The Prison Journal*, 99(6), 748-770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885519877402>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *Handbook on dynamic security and prison intelligence*. United Nations. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/UNODC_Handbook_on_Dynamic_Security_and_Prison_Intelligence.pdf
- Van de Rijt, J., van Ginneken, E. F. J. C., & Boone, M. M. (2023a). Normalisation by default and normalisation by design: A systematic review of empirical studies on the normalisation of prison life. *Incarceration*, 4, 1-19. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/26326663231196671>
- Van de Rijt, J., van Ginneken, E. F. J. C., & Boone, M. (2023b). Lost in translation: The principle of normalisation in prison policy in Norway and the Netherlands. *Punishment & Society*, 25(3), 766-783. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745221103823>
- Wener, R. E. (2012). *The environmental psychology of prisons and jails: Creating humane spaces in secure settings*. Environment and Behavior. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511979682>
- Zaviani, E. & Mahlangu, G. (2022). Digital prison rehabilitation and successful re-entry into a digital society: A systematic literature review on the new reality on prison rehabilitation. *Cogent Social Science*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116809>

Kontakt | Contact

Rebecca Walter | Universität Innsbruck | Department of Applied Sociology of Law and Criminology | rebecca.walter@uibk.ac.at

Mirjam Habisreutinger | Hochschule Campus Wien | Department of Risk and Safety Management | mirjam_johanna.habisreutinger@hcw.ac.at