Reinventing the Prison Yard:
Creating Healthier Prisons Through Landscape Architecture and Sociology

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The American System

• Goal:
  • Protect society by confining offenders

• Foundations:
  • Retribution
  • Incapacitation (major)
  • Deterrence
  • Rehabilitation

• 1.51 million state and federal prisoners (2016)
• 1% of US adult males
The American Prison Yard: Best Case

San Quentin State Prison - California

Reuters / Robert Galbraith
The American Prison Yard: Worst Case

Pelican Bay State Prison - California
Effects

• Harmful to prisoners
  – Isolation
    • From human contact
    • From nature
• Increased recidivism
  • Earning potential is decreased post-release
  • 76.6% of released prisoners in Bureau of Justice Statistics study group rearrested within 5 years
An Alternative: The Norwegian System

- Goal:
  - Protect society by rehabilitating offenders
  - Restorative Justice

- Foundations:
  - Retribution
  - Incapacitation
  - Deterrence
  - Rehabilitation (major)
    - Humane treatment
    - Exit preparation
    - Design

Halden Prison - Norway
The Norwegian Prison Yard

Halden Prison - Norway
The Norwegian Prison Yard

Bastøy Prison - Norway
**Effects**

- Healthier inmates
- Reduced recidivism
  - Programs to prepare prisoners to re-enter society
  - Norwegian reoffending rate reported at 20%
    - Bastøy Prison reoffending rate reported at 16%
Landscape Architecture

- Prison design
  - Ethical design
    - Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility
  - Village format (Halden, Bastøy)
Landscape Architecture

• Natural and designed spaces for good health
  • Halden designed to blend with landscape and avoid conflict
  • Access to natural environments has positive effects on health
  • Daily viewing of nature imagery improved mental health of inmates (Nadkarni study)
Landscape Architecture

- Outdoor programming
  - Outdoor programs for inmates
    - Growing food
    - Outdoor recreation
    - Pre-release training
Conclusions

• Potential for Norwegian-style concepts in American prisons
  – Need to be adapted
  – Many prisons already have similar programs

• Interdisciplinary collaboration

• Potential to help inmates
  – “If we treat people like animals when they are in prison they are likely to behave like animals. Here we pay attention to you as human beings.”
  – Arne Nilsen, Bastøy Prison Governor