

# Placemaking in Prison Libraries

**Siobhan McKissic**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA  
siobhan2@illinois.edu

**Delaney Bullinger**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA  
db4@illinois.edu

## Abstract

*This poster investigates the link between prison social architectures, placemaking, and their effects on the relationships between incarcerated persons and administration. We draw from existing research in art and design, specifically the idea that “place is more about the people who inhabit it and the activities they engage in than the space itself” (University of Chicago Place Lab) to develop new strategies that prison librarians can use in their daily work. We also incorporate techniques that other institutions have used to create engaging spaces that encourage learning and intellectual freedom through rehabilitation-based, technology-oriented, and traditional library educational services. While prison librarians are creating a space for rehabilitation and education, we must also consider safety on both an ethical and practical level.*

*The space needs to comply with safety standards, present no additional challenges for prison administration, and be administered in a way that is not dehumanizing to incarcerated persons. In addition to guidelines for creating a physical library space, we also discuss how library spaces are prioritized depending on the type of facility, and how a dedicated library space impacts inmates’ mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Instead of a focus on power, control and authority, prison libraries should be a place to affirm their personhood in an increasingly dehumanizing environment. When librarians and administrators work as a unit, the prison library can become a space that advances incarcerated persons’ human and First Amendment rights.*

**Keywords:** prison librarianship, placemaking, social architecture, intellectual freedom

# PlaceMaking in Prison Libraries

**Siobhan McKissic and Delaney Bullinger**  
 School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**ILLINOIS**  
 School of Information Sciences

## Introduction

This poster investigates the link between prison social architectures, placemaking, and their effects on the relationships between incarcerated persons and administration.



Halden Prison, Norway - Wikimedia Commons

## Prison Space Considerations

- Physical requirements for prisons involve more than cell dimensions
- A prison requires more space than the sum of areas required for each function
- Good security increases prisoner freedom
  - Process-oriented
  - Space-oriented
- A prison costs more to build than other buildings
- Separation of categories
  - Men and women
  - Civil and criminal offenses
  - Untried and convicted

*Technical Guidance for Prison Planning, UNOPS (2016)*

“Offenders that transition to lower custody levels and pursue programming opportunities have a greater chance of breaking out of the cycle of criminal thinking, violent behavior, and self-destructive behavior.”  
 -Scott Frakes, *Former Washington State DOC, Deputy Director of Prisons*



*Programming Security Chair  
 “An Integral Part of Programming Success”  
 - Washington State Correctional Industries*

## Library Space Considerations

- Work with administration, rather than against
- Create collaborative environment
- Create privacy through movable shelving and semi-visible areas
- Create relevant, usable space for incarcerated individuals
- Dedicated space is ideal



Jim Wilson, *New York Times*

## Designing Prison Space

- Infantilizing
- Uncomfortable
- Prioritizes Safety
- Primary Colors or Shades of Grey

When you talk about reform, you talk about transforming prisoners' lives in a positive way. But prisons offer anything but an environment for that type of transformation.

-Robert E. Roberts, *Prison: To Punish or to Reform?*

## Impact and PlaceMaking

Librarians can foster healthy relationships between administration and incarcerated individuals by advocating for more control over individuals' environment and acting as a liaison between administration and incarcerated persons.



*Toughcare Lounge - Norix Furniture*

“Now it’s back to my cement cage again

A few more hours of clanging and banging”

-Dennis Mansker,  
*Another Day in the Champaign County Jail*

## Acknowledgments



View our complete bibliography:  
<http://bit.ly/2Ev8XKu>

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