Architecture and Culture

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfac20

The “Prison House” and Normalization. Between the Reassertion of Privacy and the Risk of Collectiveness

Sabrina Puddu

To cite this article: Sabrina Puddu (2022): The “Prison House” and Normalization. Between the Reassertion of Privacy and the Risk of Collectiveness, Architecture and Culture, DOI: 10.1080/20507828.2022.2106535

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2022.2106535

Published online: 12 Sep 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 54

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rfac20

ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

Sabrina Puddu
Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
sabrina.puddu@kuleuven.be

Keywords: principle of normalization, normal and extraordinary, Prison House, privacy, collective living

The "Prison House" and Normalization. Between the Reassertion of Privacy and the Risk of Collectiveness

Sabrina Puddu

ABSTRACT The principle of "normalization" in penology maintains that the life of people in captivity should resemble as far as possible the positive aspects of "normal" life in free society. To critically understand how the theories and practices of normalization impact our discourses about space within and beyond detention institutions, this essay considers the "prison house," a genre that includes a range of homely, small-scale carceral facilities. The "prison house" attempts to normalize life, often through a process of "home-ification." In doing so, it sublimates the notion of privacy – in its double modern connotation, as defined by Robin Evans, of solitude and domesticity – and re-introduces collectiveness as a choreographed practice hailed as a tool for reform and as guarantor of a daily social order. This article asks: does the "prison house" mimic or anticipate how free people live together in the residential architecture of the city?

pp. 1–32
DOI:10.1080/20507828.2022.2106535
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

© 2022 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The principle of “normalization,” as deployed within the discourse of penology, maintains that punishment should be limited to the loss of freedom and that the life of people in captivity should resemble to the greatest extent possible the positive aspects of normal life in free society.[1] As such, it endorses self-empowerment for incarcerated subjects, who “must be given the freedom to define their own (lawful) way of living and be allowed an optimum (normalized) framework for doing so.”[2] And it anticipates that emancipation will enable them “to take an active part in society as a ‘full legal citizen’.”[3]

To critically understand how the theories and practices of normalization impact our discourses about space more generally, this essay considers the “prison house,” a genre that includes a range of homely, small-scale facilities such as transition houses, halfway houses, youth houses and detention houses. A collection of typological studies, design guidelines and an atlas of precedents hints at the imminent constitution of a specific type.[4] Building on these studies, I question the relation between the “prison house” project and the project for collective living in free society. Does the “prison house” mimic or anticipate how people live together in the city? Is the role of the prison house to prepare people for free society, or does prison in whatever form act, as Ivan Illich suggests, as a double of society that constitutes a scapegoat, a ritual space that through its very existence allows the rest of society to continue in a “normal” way?[5]

The following inquiry into the transfiguration of the “normal” in the nascent type of the “prison house” raises the doubt as to whether the declared efforts to simulate “normal” aspects of free society, such as privacy and collectiveness, operate only one way – from free society to prison. I suggest that in fact feedback loops may be created between the two, such that so-called free society comes to replicate the normalized prison. I therefore propose that we might need a different category, that of the “extraordinary,” as opposed to the “normal,” in order to better address the way we think about living collectively – and to ask whether it is possible to design for it.

The “Prison House,” a Group Cohabitation Experiment

Since 2012, the Belgian NGO De Huizen has worked to reform the country’s penitentiary system by proposing that large prison complexes should be substituted with a network of small-scale, differentiated and socially integrated detention houses. This proposal – which has found some partial realization in two pilot projects for “transition houses” commissioned by the Belgian Ministry of Justice – exists at the frontier of a movement that critiques mass incarceration. It is a movement that attempts to “normalize” prison life, frequently through a process of “home-ification,” and to reduce the daunting, isolated impression of prisons by integrating them into the city.[6]

Attempts to “home-ify” imprisonment have cyclically recurred throughout modern history, mostly on the grounds of esthetics and size, as

a neutralization of the institutional character of the large modern prison of individual cells. Such projects often rely on the family as their social model and on the family house as a typological and esthetic reference. The archetype for this "family system" is the Mettray Penal Colony in France, opened in 1840, and described by both Michel Foucault and Robin Evans as a high point in modern experiments in incarceration.[7] In this colony, young people were grouped in families of forty, each architecturally corresponding to a pavilion and each with a hierarchical structure and a paterfamilias in charge. The aim of the reformers was to provide imprisoned young people with an "ideal family" to compensate for the poor family environment from which most had come. In practice, however, this was a model of collective cohabitation, and the question arises as to whether it is possible to perpetuate an idea of family and domesticity through collective living experiments. I argue that, rather than indulge in the reference to the family, we should read the prison house as an experiment in group cohabitation, one that is allegedly directed toward self-empowerment. It is a choreographed attempt to instill collectiveness into a group of individuals who have traditionally been denied collectivity.

A late twentieth-century experiment in collective imprisonment can be found in the Danish "halfway house," Pension Skejby. "It is not a prison […]," said one resident,

> but it's a sort of a 'kollektiv' [commune] and in a better way because […] when you go out of your room, you can still talk to people, and there are always one [sic] in the kitchen or in the living room, always someone you can talk to, so you are not alone.[8]

Other residents used the term *bofaelleskab*, a flat-sharing community.[9] Opened in 1973 in a suburb of the city of Århus, Pension Skejby differs from similar transition houses run under the jurisdiction of the Danish Ministry of Justice in the way the imprisoned guests (called *Plusbeboerne*, or "plus residents") are deliberately mixed with free individuals (*Minusbeboerne*) in an unrestricted environment. On average about twenty *Plusbeboerne* and *Minusbeboerne* live in Skejby, both female and male, and twelve staff members work there, including prison guards, social workers, and educators. Pension Skejby has been a standard-bearer in the shifting ideas about the design of institutional environments since the 1960s and 1970s, when the principle of "normalization" emerged alongside de-institutional and anti-institutional ideals.

Sociologist Linda Kjær Minke has described Skejby as a pedagogical experiment where "socially or criminally deprived people may learn conventional behavior from socially well-fitting persons with whom they can have daily interaction."[10] *Minusbeboerne* are usually young academics, social workers, students, or unemployed people seeking an education or a job. While undoubtedly attracted to Skejby because of its

cheap rent, they are also driven by the challenge of engaging as equals with people whose experience and background differ markedly from their own, of creating a daily collective life with them. Although Minke acknowledges that *Minusbeboerne* “are not expected to act as ‘undercover’ reformers for the system [nor] are they required to have a particular attitude or way of behaving except of acting in a socially responsible way toward each other,” it is implicitly understood that the pedagogical process flows by example in a single direction from the *Minus* to the *Plusbeboerne*.[11]

Pension Skejby was originally designed as an institution for people with drug addiction who shared the building with non-drug users. It was very soon absorbed by the Danish Ministry of Justice and occupied for the new purpose of allowing convicted people to join the residents. It is a mildly brutalist red brick and concrete building designed by Danish architects Knud Friis and Elmar Moltke Nielsen, with a battery of single rooms in one block and an enfilade of communal spaces in the other (Figure 1). The twenty or so residents are divided into four teams, each with an assigned kitchen area and a joint budget (Figure 2). There are weekly meetings among the teams where potential conflicts are discussed and decisions are taken. Single rooms (Figure 3) were intentionally kept small by the architects – about seven square meters excluding the sink and wardrobe niches – in order to encourage the residents to spend most of their time in the common areas.[12]

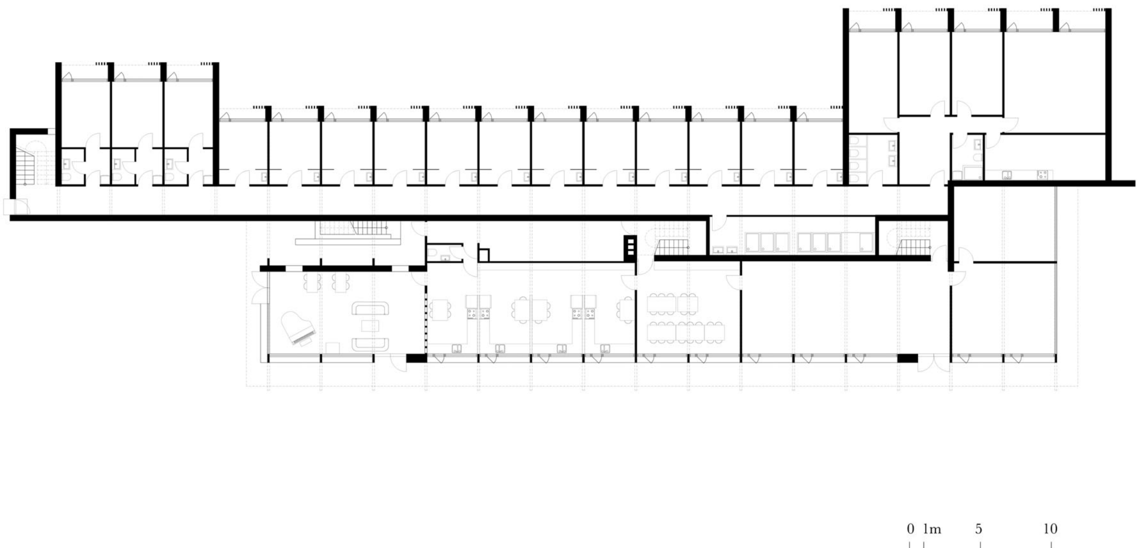

Figure 1
“A sort of *kollektiv*.” Attempts to “normalize” prison life. Floorplan of the Pension Skejby (opened in 1973). Drawing by A. Lampropoulou and S. Puddu (2020). 1. Front garden. 2. Entrance. 3. TV room. 4. Dining room. 5. Kitchen clusters. 6. Living room. 7. Single bedroom. 8. En suite single room. 9. Apartment for a family (now staff and meeting rooms). 10. Shared showers and toilet. 11. Back garden.

Figure 2
The kitchen as the favorite locus to un-learn and re-learn communal living: one of the kitchens for the four teams at the Pension Skejby. Photograph by Francisca Muller, published in 2019 in https://www.destentor.nl/zwolle/dit-is-het-enige-pension-ter-wereld-waar-studenten-en-gevangenen-samenwonen~a690f58a/159213919/. © DPG media.

Figure 3
The bedroom and the sublimation of privacy: a bedroom at the Pension Skejby. Published in 2007 in https://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/tremmer/article.php/id-8173024.html. © TV2 Danmark.

Despite a regular turnover of residents, a high degree of space appropriation has been observed. “All residents have the opportunity to influence the environment” by bringing or making their own belongings and furniture, so the bedrooms are highly curated and personalized cocoons.[13] Moreover, “the common areas signal that people with an interest in creating a homely atmosphere live here.”[14] The way the space is structured also supports homeliness and appropriation. The enfilade of common rooms – including a television room, a dining room, the four kitchen areas and a living space – provides a certain depth of space that allows for multiple patterns of association and occupation. The geometry and orientation of the bedrooms – each a square – allow for furniture to be easily rearranged despite the rooms’ small size.

It is tempting to agree with those who consider Skejby one of the pioneering best-practices in the attempt to “normalize” prison life, however controversial this concept and its application might be. Yet exchange between free society outside this detention facility and the framework of life inside is not uni-directional. Indeed, free *kollektivs* – those not populated partly by prisoners – might be curious about how space is appropriated by a fast-moving community of temporary residents at Skejby and how collectiveness is choreographed as a pedagogic experiment.

The Principle of “Normalization.” From Disability to Prison Studies

But what is “normalization”? First, advocates of the principle stress the difference between the penological concept of normalization (of prison life) and Foucauldian normalization (of the incarcerated subject).[15] While they warn against conflating the two, they recognize the ambiguity of the terms and the difficulty, in practice and theory, of drawing a line between them.[16] Second, they point out that normalization must be understood as the opposite of standardization. Prison Governor and researcher Hans J. Engbo hints at this, defining normalization as the provision of a “normalized framework” for imprisoned people to freely define their own lives and “individual norms of living.”[17] Self-determination is paired with normalization, suggesting the facilitation of a process of individualization. Finally, normalization’s advocates claim that in principle it has no ultimate normative power: whenever decisions are made on what aspects of prison life are to be normalized, the mainstream is the model, and it changes. This means that attempts at censorship, educational paternalism, or moral judgment should be avoided as much as possible.[18]

The principle of normalization as understood in penology, rather than in its Foucauldian conceptualization, will constitute the theoretical background of this essay’s analysis and discussion. The principle was developed in the 1960s in the field of disability, before seeping into prison studies. It aligned with wider anti-institutional movements that were emerging at that time, and with the postwar European sensitivity toward protecting human rights. The pioneering fathers of this principle – the Danish reformer Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen, the Director of the Swedish

Association for Retarded Children Bengt Nirje, and the German-American academic Wolf Wolfensberger – were shocked by the prevalence of large, remote, poorly managed institutions used to house disabled people. Moreover, they were confronted by a general lack of relevant critical studies on disability and a similar lack of criticism toward the way that groups labeled as "deviant" were "managed" in society. "The field was so poor," Wolfensbeger would later recall, that "there was no place in [it] … to criticize the conditions and the functioning of these institutions."[19]

"To let the mentally retarded obtain an existence as close to the normal as possible" was the first formulation of the principle introduced by Bank-Mikkelsen in Danish legislation in 1959.[20] It was then expanded by Nirje in a 1969 essay which claimed that "the normalization principle means making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society."[21] This includes the opportunity to live in buildings with "normal locations and normal sizes" and that respond to the same standards that apply to ordinary citizens.[22]

Wolfensberger's 1972 book *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services* translated Nirje's concept for a North American audience, pushing for a pragmatic implementation as well as for a systematic theory of normalization. To construct this, the book first elaborated on the social definition of deviancy and its specificity in history.[23] "A person can be said to be deviant if he is perceived as being significantly different from others in some aspect that is considered of relative importance, and if this difference is negatively valued."[24] Normalization is then the "utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible, in order to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible."[25] The major corollary to this is the "maximum integration of the perceived or potential deviant person into the societal mainstream."[26]

The book's relevance lies in the conceptual leap it enabled, moving from a value-based, ideological approach deeply rooted in a human rights perspective to an evidence-based, practical approach. For some critics, the direct application of the principle in practice was problematic.[27] Shifting the emphasis from the right to a normal condition of life for "deviant" individuals to that of a normalized individual, and hence almost aligning with a Foucauldian normalization, Wolfensberger unwittingly encouraged negative "attitudes toward difference;" aiming at integration, he fostered a denial of difference in favor of the superior value of conformity.[28] Wolfensberger's book also helped to expand the scope of normalization from a principle applied only to the "mentally disabled" to one valid also for the many other "deviant" groups in society. Yet he often cautiously excluded imprisoned people from his discussion; some corollaries of normalization, such as integration, were not considered applicable to them.

The translation of the principle to prison studies, policies, and practices occurred more recently,[29] even though ideas about matching

prison life to life in free society can be traced back to the 1960s. Normalization was mentioned in the 1955 UN Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners, and penal policies in Europe have included it since the 1970s.[30] This can be read as part of a general movement against the condition of the prison as a “total institution,” cut off from wider society,[31] and against what criminologist Gresham M. Sykes described in 1958 as the “pains of imprisonment.”[32] Yet strong advocacy for the principle and its implementation in practice is more recent in history.

According to criminologist Helene De Vos, “ideological challenges” and “practical difficulties” are reasons for this delay in moving from theory to practice. De Vos argues that the idea of making prison life “normal” goes against popular views in public opinion, political propaganda, and the media; furthermore, the spatial organization of existing prisons is said to be inadequate for them to emulate life conditions in society.[33] More importantly, the translation of the “seemingly straightforward” principle of normalization into prison policies and practices highlights some key tensions.[34] One of these tensions concerns the question of whether the approach to the principle is instrumental or intrinsic. Should normalization of life in prison be implemented as an instrumental means to other aims of imprisonment, such as reintegration, rehabilitation, rendering responsible, etc.? Or should it be considered intrinsically, as an end in itself, a right with a value independent of its utility?[35] A second – related – tension is the interpretation of the principle as either disciplinary or emancipatory. Should normalization be oriented toward discipline (a standardizing perspective) or toward emancipation (an individualizing perspective)? How can the blurred distinction between the two be managed? While endorsing the emulation in captivity of normal/mainstream social and spatial patterns of life, how can the inevitable tendency to discipline be overcome?[36]

A further and perhaps overarching tension must be added to highlight the intrinsic dichotomy between normalization and liberty. For its advocates, the reason for the existence of the principle of normalization in prison studies is to reduce punishment to the deprivation of liberty only. This deprivation of liberty then also becomes the principle’s ultimate goal. It comes to define the “upper limit of the normalization process,” making it impossible to reach a complete resemblance between life in prison and life outside.[37]

The Physical Environment. Institutions vs. Group Residential Services

Before moving further, I would like to clarify that I do not here intend to endorse normalization, nor the use of design to pursue it. Instead, I am interested in critically understanding how the theories and practices of normalization have had an impact on the way we think through and about space within and beyond detention institutions. The reader will easily recognize that some of the following observations – which are made in

relation to specialized institutes – have a resonance in the wider realm of housing design.

Advocates of the normalization principle across the social sciences, disability studies, penology, and prison studies suggest that specially designed or retrofitted buildings are a necessary condition for its effective application. Discussions usually address questions of location and accessibility, size, and the way in which such buildings will be perceived. Because of the importance given to inhabitants' agency and self-determination, there is concern that they should be in some way in control of the physical environment, or at least aspects of it. The structural and organizational qualities of the space and of spatial relationships, so important to architects, are left largely unexamined.

Arguments about the importance of architecture for normalization can be traced back to the very first formulations of the principle by Bank-Mikkelsen. We have already mentioned Nirjes' demand for people with disabilities to live in facilities of the same standard as those of "ordinary" people.[38] Wolfensberger goes a step further, noticing how many "human management systems" – institutions for mental disorders, geriatrics, penal correction, etc. – include residential facilities. Normalization can be offered to or imposed on people that are hosted in, if not confined to, group placements (institutes or other group residences) or individual placements (independent houses or foster homes). To Wolfensberger, group placements pose the greatest challenges, and these are "inseparable from architectural ones."[39] He cries out against the "old institutions," against:

> A deindividualizing society in which persons are congregated in numbers distinctly larger than might be found in a large family; in which they are highly regimented; in which the physical or social environment aims at a low common denominator; and in which all or most of the transactions of daily life are carried out under one roof, on one campus, or in a largely segregated fashion.[40]

The fathers of normalization claim that the "old institutions" must be substituted with "Group Residential Services:" a specialized, continuous system of small, community-integrated, dispersed domiciliary units. Group Residential Services are small so as to promote integration with surrounding communities, specialized according to the different types of guests, and they work as a network which also includes non-domiciliary services. Exactly the same recipe is proposed by the Belgian NGO De Huizen, "The Houses," in their proposal to substitute current large prisons with a network of differentiated small-scale and socially integrated "detention houses."

De Huizen. From the Concept of the “Detention House” to the Opening of the “Transition House”

De Huizen – which is now reaching other countries through its European network spin-off NGO, “Rescaled” – builds on the ongoing exchange between academics, activists, prison practitioners, imprisoned people and prison staff through workshops, focus groups, and open discussions.[41] Its aim is to identify processes of governance, their implementation (preferably through bottom-up strategies), basic rules of cohabitation, pragmatic organization of daily life, and the ideal number of guests for each house – now set at twelve to fifteen people.[42] These discussions echo debates on how we should live and work together that are concomitantly happening elsewhere in free society and, in particular, in co-housing experiments.

De Huizen has involved architects and architecture students in the design of several proposals in which the resonance between co-housing experiments and “detention houses” is immediately clear.[43] The floorplans abandon a corridor organization in favor of clusters of individual sleeping units. These are interspersed within generous communal spaces for leisure activities, eating and cooking rituals, and utilities. Workshops and shops are introduced to guarantee in-house creativity whilst also offering an interface with the city, promoting interaction and mitigating not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) concerns. In an almost perfect echoing effect, features recently summarized as the components of the “new architecture of the collective” all appear: “cluster apartments,” “an eclectic mix of shared domestic facilities,” and the “offer [of] public programmes catering explicitly to people living in the neighborhood.”[44]

De Huizen/Rescaled refuses a typological approach, arguing that each house must operate and be designed differently according to its context and specialization. Although none of its specific proposals have been built, the concept has had an impact on the Belgian Ministry of Justice. Two pilot “transition houses” have recently opened after a public bid involving private security company G4S Care.[45] These “transition houses” are a compromise. They are not the “detention houses” of De Huizen’s original proposal, which were meant to replace prisons at every security level, including the highest (they were not meant as another transitional component, adding to the already large Belgian carceral archipelago).[46] Yet, as acknowledged by members of the NGO Rescaled, the normalization principle in these transition houses is faithfully applied:

> Life in a transition house is normalized and life coaches assist in ensuring the smooth running of the day-to-day. Each prisoner has to do his own laundry and is responsible for preparing his own meals. They all have a room offering complete privacy, but everyday tasks take place in common areas. The prisoners’ sense of community is stimulated in this way and they also learn to assume responsibility.[47]

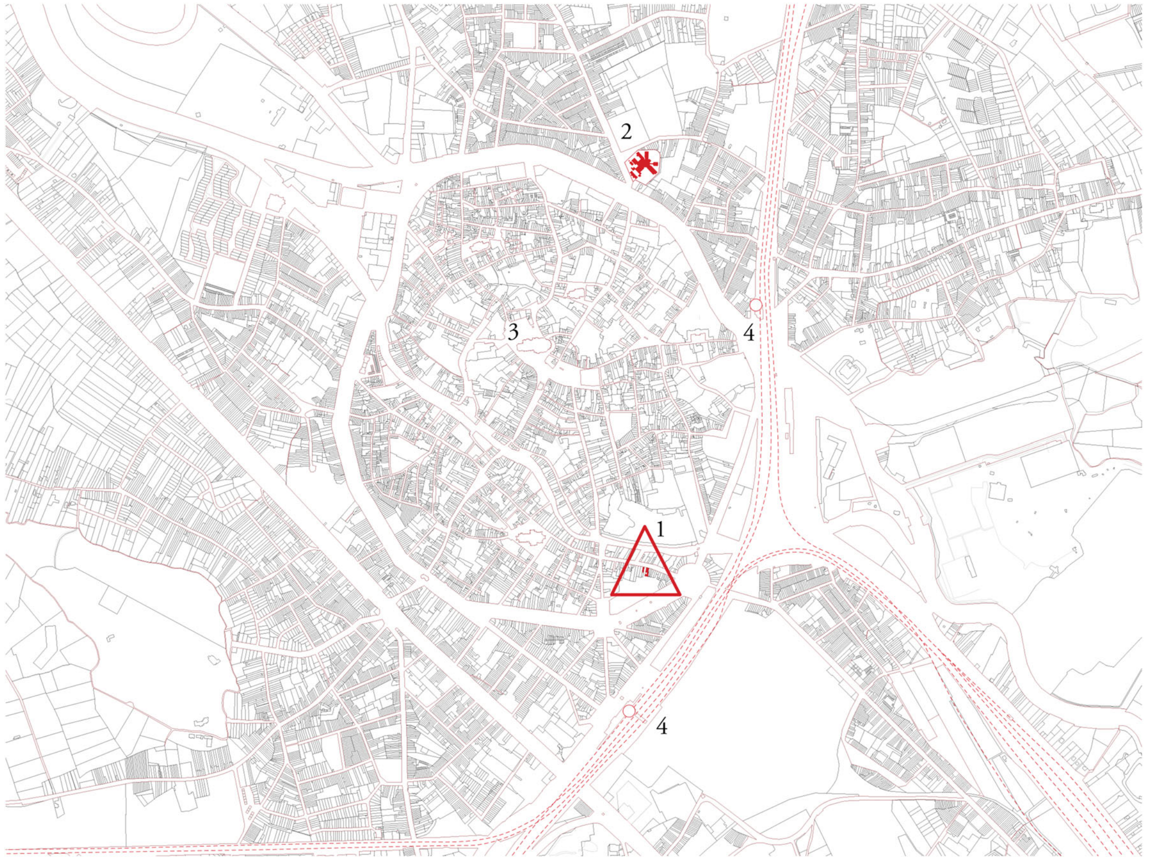

Figure 4
The city as a true "opportunity factory." Map of the city of Mechelen and location of the transition house. Drawing by A. Lampropoulou and S. Puddu (2020). 1. Transition House. 2. Mechelen Prison. 3. Mechelen city center. 4. Train station.

The first transition house was inaugurated in September 2019 in the Flemish city of Mechelen (Figure 4). In the words of the city's mayor, this project matches the municipality's ambition to become a true "opportunity factory."[48] The house hosts about fifteen people who are not called inmates but "participants" to stress their active involvement in the project.[49] They come from previous experience of captivity inside a typical nineteenth-century prison nearby which features a radial structure with galleries attached to segregated cells. The experiment is very recent, but so far reviews of the house have been mostly positive and the response from the neighborhood is said to be accommodating.[50]

The "house" (Figure 5) occupies two city-center buildings owned by the city and connected on the main façade by an arch which faces a shopping and residential road.[51] "Just a house in the row" says the G4S coordinator.[52] The smaller building is a separate house with four bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and a little patio, and it hosts four "participants" who enjoy a large degree of independence and are not obliged to give daily reports to their "life coach." The other is a four-storey

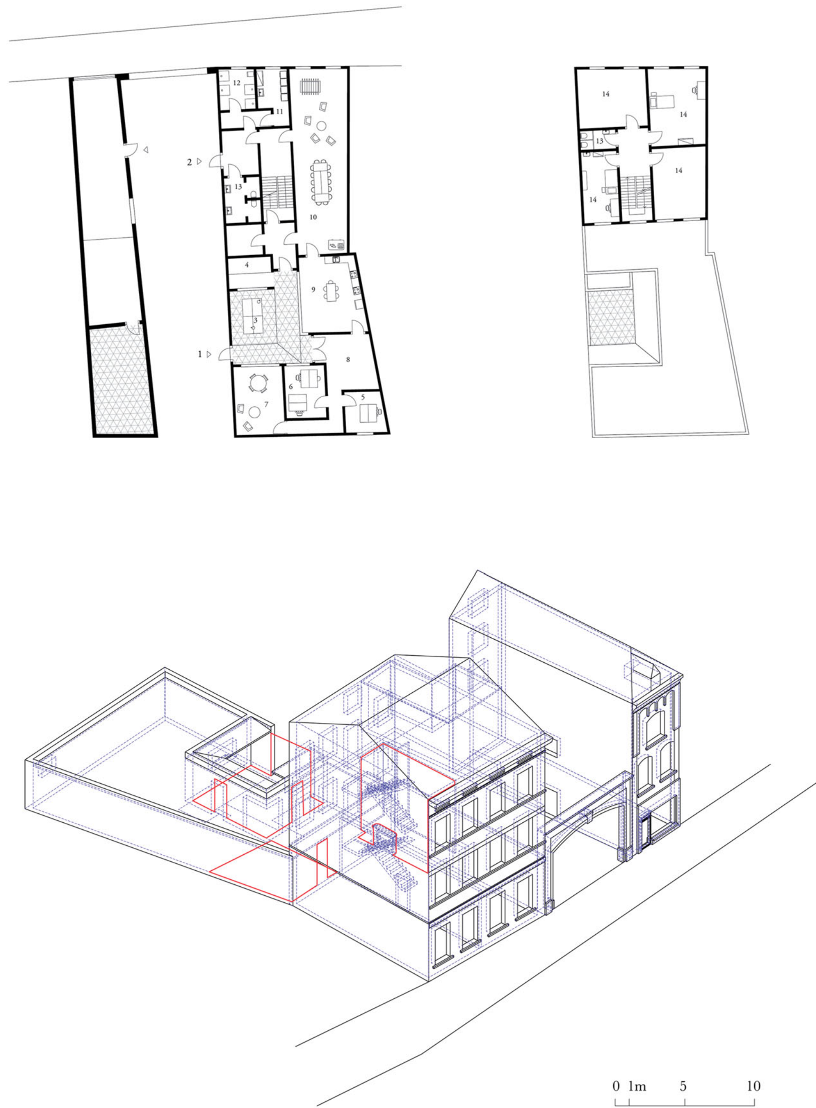

Figure 5
The alley, the ping-pong patio, the kitchen, the living room, the staircase, and the bedroom. Axonometric and floorplan of Mechelen Transition House (elaboration based on visitors' description). Drawings by A. Lampropoulou and S. Puddu (2020). 1. Entrance to the main building. 2. Secondary staff entrance. 3. Patio. 4. Storage. 5. Staff bureau (coordinator office). 6. Staff bureau (life coaches' office). 7. Visitors' room and private meeting room. 8. Entrance hall. 9. Kitchen. 10. Living room. 11. Laundry. 12. Showers. 13. Toilet. 14. Bedrooms.

building which contains bedrooms and the communal facilities for the participants as well as offices for the staff (the "life coaches") and rooms for meetings and visitors. Inside the house, participants are free to move around and to "associate" until the curfew at 11.00 p.m. both in their private rooms and in the communal spaces (the living room, kitchen, fitness room and patio with ping-pong table and smoking area).

While movement in the interior of the buildings is not restricted, exchange with the exterior is monitored. Participants have a personal fob card that opens the entrance doors. They can leave and enter the house independently, but they are only allowed to do so according to previous agreements with their life coaches. To get into the house and up to their bedrooms, participants follow a route from the entrance – monitored by a surveillance camera and a doorman – that unfolds through some of the communal areas of the house before reaching the main staircase to the upper floors.

Bedrooms are individual, very generous in size and are furnished with some basic items. As described in the Household Rules, "the individual room of the participant has a bed, table, chair, cupboard and sink as standard. Painting and wallpapering are not allowed. The participant can further furnish his room with decorative objects."[53] Rooms can be locked from the outside by the participants to protect their goods when away, but not from the inside – intimacy is considered a luxury too far.

The second transition house is in the Walloon municipality of Enghien (Figure 6). This is also managed by G4S Care with the same formula: participants receive guidance from social workers, psychologists and criminologists so that they can "become an autonomous part of society again."[54] The house opened in January 2020 after a delay that was probably caused by the locals' protest campaign *NON! à la maison de transition pour déteneus a Enghien,* hinting at the wider skepticism in the Walloon region toward the concept of small-scale prison houses. Still not at full capacity, it is generally regarded as less successful than the Mechelen house for two reasons.[55] First, its isolated and peripheral location is said to work against promoting normalization and integration. The Enghien house is not in the city center but is inserted in the ribbon structure of houses, farms, and industrial buildings characteristic of Belgium's urbanized countryside. Second, the building (Figure 7), a prefabricated one-storey office building in a business/industrial area, is considered less distinctive than the old row house in Mechelen. The transition house shares the building with a co-working company, hence both the interior spaces and the internal courtyard are split into two for the separate communities, and so are the entrances: on the front is the door for the co-working crew, on the side the controlled access for the participants. Some large meeting and event spaces are meant to be shared. The house's spatial layout is very basic and tries to make the best out of what was existing. The entrance hall gives access to a long corridor decorated with some homely features – shelves, plants, frames on the

wall – that serves a row of Ikea-furnished bedrooms where the offices used to be. At one end of the corridor are the meeting and visitors’ rooms, offices, toilets and the laundry; in the middle, facing the courtyard, is the kitchen.

From this journey through some instances of “prison houses,” two key spatial components emerge: the kitchen and the bedroom. I use them to try to understand the transfiguration of ideas of collectiveness and privacy occurring in the prison house – a transfiguration that relates both to traditional prisons and to residential buildings in free society.

The Kitchen and the Bedroom

A guard at London’s Pentonville prison once told me about an imprisoned man who cooked a pigeon using the kettle in his cell.[56] This is not an exclusive Pentonville recipe but a common practice, a recipe in the “cell’s cookbook” and a tactic of resistance against the alienation of imprisoned people from food production in prison.[57] Many projects of small-scale detention – together with many projects of collective living – center their ethos around the shared kitchen.[58] In free society,

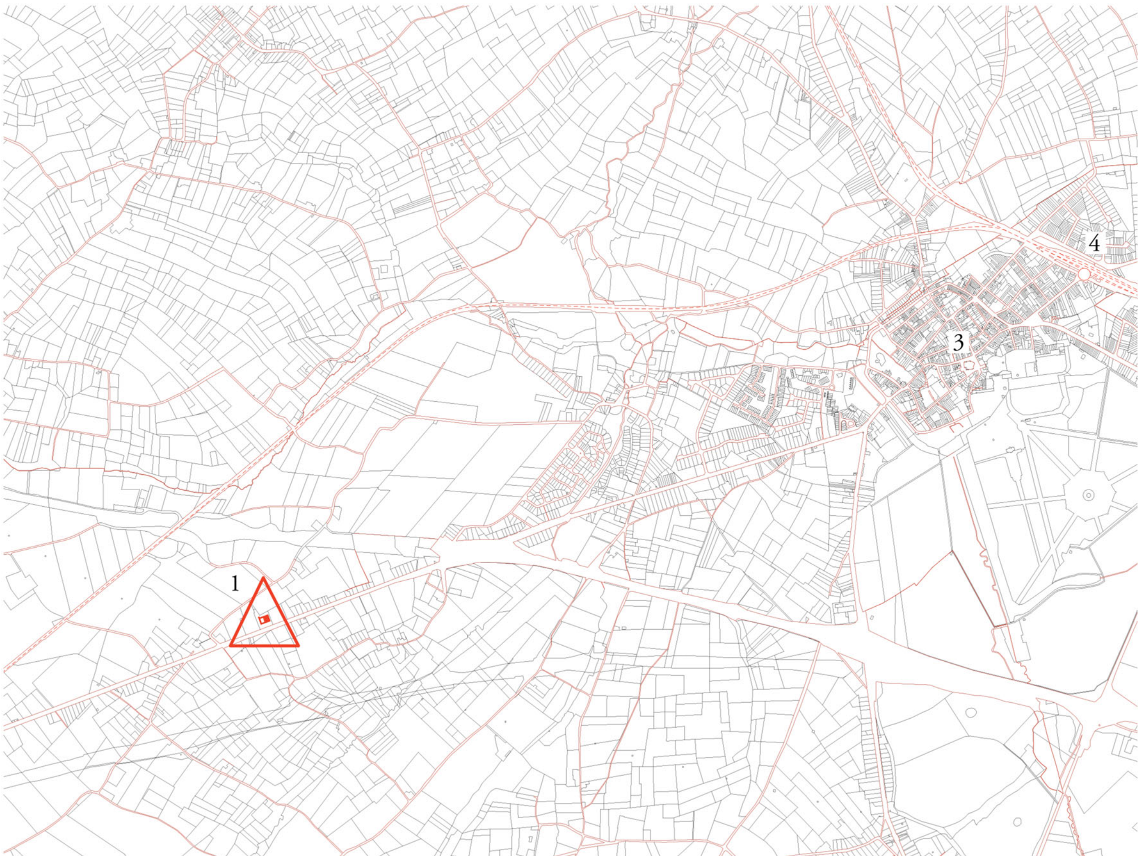

Figure 6
NON! à la maison de transition pour déteneus à Enghien. Map of the town of Enghien and location of the Transition House. Drawing by A. Lampropoulou and S. Puddu (2020). 1. Transition House. 3. Enghien City Center. 4. Train station.

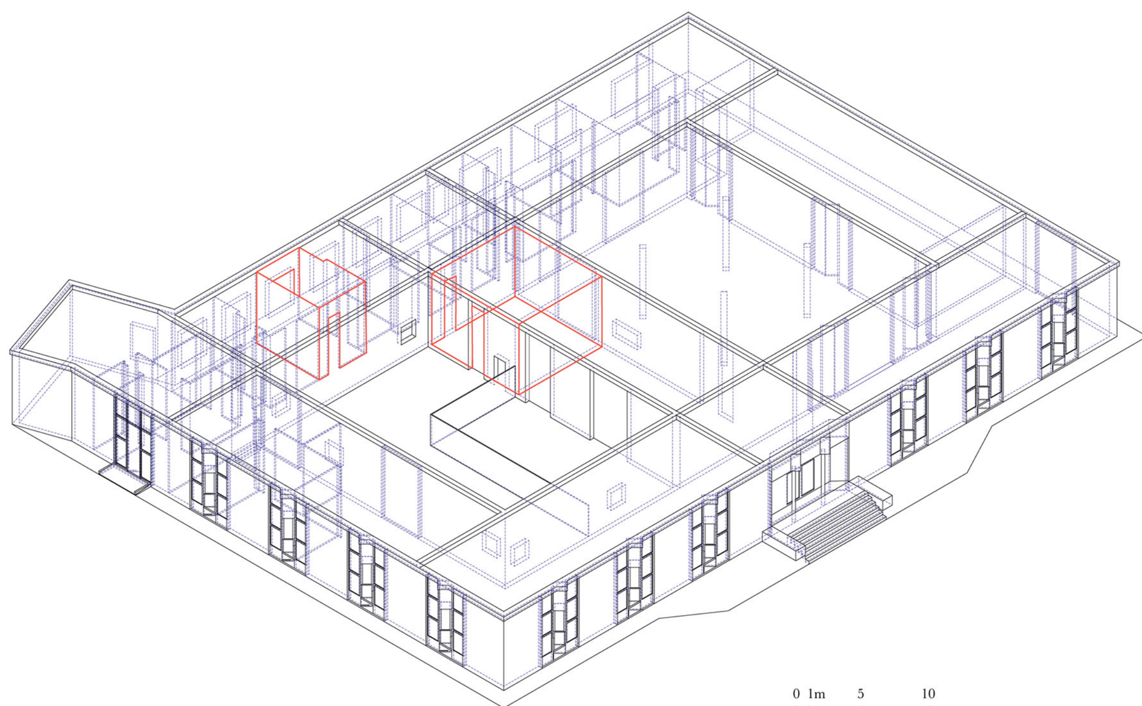

Figure 7
The corridor, the bedroom, the kitchen and the split patio. Axonometric and floorplan of Enghien Transition House (elaboration based on visitors' description). Drawings by A. Lampropoulou and S. Puddu (2020). 1. Entrance. 2. Doorman. 3. Bedroom. 4. Visitors' Room. 5. Coaching Room. 6. Kitchen and Living. 7. Courtyard. 8. Bathroom.

collective kitchens are witnessing a resurgence, especially in experiments in cooperative living and neighborhood community kitchens. Such phenomena trigger new rituals of convivial banqueting and cooking, whilst supporting alternative systems of food production, distribution and consumption that question gender and class inequalities. Organized by cooperatives, NGOs and grassroots organizations, these experiences challenge both domestic cooking inside the family home and traditional forms of top-down communal catering by public institutions such as canteens.[59]

In the prison house, the kitchen is often domestic in its homely appearance and shared in its access and use. This is the place where imprisoned people regain the right to prepare their own food rather than receiving it from the institution, something which is considered an important step toward self-determination. It is also the place where they can experience “normal” alternatives of cooking, not the creative, informal practices like cooking a pigeon in a kettle in one’s cell. In a conversation with the coordinator of the transition house in Mechelen, the multifaced role of the communal kitchen was emphasized. It was characterized as a “place to gain independence,” a “learning spot” where a skill essential for normal life is acquired often through exchange and example: life coaches organize cooking activities, coupling participants who can cook with those who cannot. It was also described as a “place of care for yourself and others” and an instance of “collective living,” preparing food as a way of being together.[60] Through cooking and dining, the kitchen is depicted as the locus where collectiveness is un-learned and re-learned.[61] During the opening days of both Mechelen and Enghien the kitchen was indeed highly celebrated, becoming the stage where the Minister of Justice was interviewed by the two national television channels.[62] Cameras focused on details that would be very banal in most other contexts: a fruit basket, some pans and an Ikea set of utensils.

The bedroom is the other space that finds recurrent representation as a positive asset in the press and in institutional descriptions of the prison house. When a person arrives in their bedroom at Mechelen or Skejby, they do so after having lived in a cell elsewhere – these cells are individual if in the newest prisons or collectively inhabited due to overcrowding in old prisons. The coordinator of the Mechelen house describes how the sheer sight of a normal single bedroom that can be personalized is a “culture shock” for the new participant.[63] Tellingly, for the first few days, participants will keep calling it a “cell” before adjusting to “room” in the normalized jargon of the house. In Skejby we have already noticed how room geometry and furniture were said to encourage a degree of individualization. In Mechelen, the house coordinator suggests that a similar process of appropriation is happening: the rooms are very generous in space and the predominantly-Ikea furniture provided by the institution is kept to a minimum to allow participants to bring personal items and build their own private domain.[64]

While space appropriation is a practice of resistance exercised in any prison,[65] in the prison house this is legitimized, even encouraged, after some house rules are set up.

The prison house's bedroom is fed by two precedents: the prison cell and the single private bedroom. Recent publications in carceral geography aim to give a comprehensive account of the prison cell as "arguably – whether for good or otherwise – the fundamental building block of life in prison."[66] Works in the field of architecture describe the cell as an architectural entity that, while certainly pushed to its extreme in the prison, has played a much wider and ambivalent role in architectural and human history. It is:

> An illustration of loneliness, togetherness, sameness, selflessness, laziness, asceticism, libertinism, domestication, inhabitation, socialization, incarceration, liberation, oppression, separation, individuation, cellularization, isolation, contemplation, collectivization, equality, proximity, anonymity, poverty, luxury, interiority, enclosure, seclusion, exclusion, inclusion, life and prison.[67]

The authors of these words, Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara, from the architectural office Dogma, are contributing to a revision of our understanding of the architecture of the modern private room. Following a tradition in architectural theory where the room is seen as the "product of specific historical circumstances [...] related to [...] the domestication of society," they read the room as the spatial construct defining the specific position of any family member within the system of the household, according to gender, role, and class, hence producing an individuation of the subject. "More specifically the private room has contributed to such individuation by staging and celebrating notions of privacy as the possibility of freedom from the burden and pressures of the social world."[68]

It seems that, in principle, the prison house weakens the pivotal role of the cell as an enduring central space in the prison experience.[69] Compared to the "room as home"[70] or to the "total cell,"[71] this bedroom is certainly less crowded with activities (like cooking), with projections and dreams, or with suffering and conflict. However, it is in the normalized bedroom of the prison house that privacy is reasserted and celebrated as an untouchable societal value. The rest of the experience, in the other spaces of the house, and in the kitchen in particular, is a choreographed form of collectiveness.

The Risk of Collectiveness and the Reassertion of Privacy

This discussion about the kitchen and the bedroom takes us back to the question of how privacy and collectiveness ("association" in prison studies) are normalized in prison and in the prison house in particular.

Within free society, mainstream narratives of modern subjectivity have argued that modern man has built his subjectivity within a domestic interior, namely the secluded single-family home and its rooms.[72] Counter-arguments challenge this reading, stating that the modern individual’s intimate universe is – and should be – also shaped by the outside world through relationships and confrontations with others in public.[73] Others suggest that subjectivity should be shaped within a collective interior: socialist and welfare-state designed collective housing or, increasingly, market-driven collectivized housing and bottom-up cooperative intentional communes. In the latter, experiments are considering what can be shared and what should remain private, and they reflect on the significance of the bedroom within a collective endeavor.

What seems to emerge, in current practices and debates in prison studies driven by a normalizing perspective, is that privacy and collectiveness are fundamental rights in people’s life and as such should also co-exist in captivity. This is a revision of older prison models: prison privacy has shifted from being an enforced solitude to becoming a beloved domesticity,[74] and collectiveness is carefully reintroduced after being risk-assessed, understood as instrumental to the subject’s reform and the institution’s security. The choreography of collectiveness comes from the top, yet imprisoned people’s responses and feedback continuously inform adjustments to the patterns of association that have been defined by the staff.

In the model modern prison that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the cell was, in Evans’ words, “a kind of chrysalis within which the transmutation of the criminal mind was to take place.”[75] Hence, “any form of society was suspect both morally and aesthetically” and intercourse was what hindered the potential intrinsic goodness of a man.[76] In an ever-growing bourgeois society, the private space was indeed considered the only possible locus for the establishment of morality. Whether enforced isolation or the restrained intimacy of the family dwelling, visions of privacy opposed the disordered collective amalgams of the pre-modern prison and of the city. Evans argued that solitude and domesticity were simply two distinct varieties of privacy, thus making the connection between the prison and what, at first sight, is a realm very distant from it: housing.[77] Even more than surveillance, privacy was the overarching principle and agency of novel spatial organization.[78] The prison cell of the modern prison was a meticulously controlled environment containing everything necessary to human life. This sophisticated design ensured permanent solitude that encompassed the whole prison, including the moments of collectiveness. Whenever imprisoned people came together in “association,” they had to be isolated from each other – as in the case of the racks of stacked, separated seating in the auditoriums of prison chapels.

To grasp fully our current understandings of privacy and collectiveness in prison environments we need to locate them in a

historical trajectory that spans from (a) the seventeenth-/ eighteenth-century critique of gregarious pre-modern prisons; (b) the responding experiments in solitary confinement in the "modern prison" in the first half of the nineteenth century, where privacy was valued and the cell was nominated as the place for reflection and moral transformation; and (c) the swift reaction to the model of segregated prison cells, as either too harsh or too soft in its application.[79] This last reaction did not lead the cell to be abandoned in prison design, but it altered the way in which the cell was seen by prison governors: while faith in the transformative capacity of the cell faded, it could now be used as a deterrent for both imprisoned and free people – neither would choose to live in it.[80] No real change can be seen in the conception of prison design until the mid-twentieth century, when (d) the postwar welfare state promoted and legitimized the re-introduction of social relationships (the "right to association"). In contemporary reformism, this is (e) complemented by an emphasis on the reassertion of privacy as a right to be balanced with moments of collective living.[81]

The reintroduction of "normal" social relationships in the modern and contemporary prison – a realm where privacy is highly valued – is not just driven by collectiveness being recognized as a right. First, it is deemed instrumental for the rehabilitation of the subject: in more progressive reformative thinking there is an idea that the subject can be reformed through social interaction instead of being reformed in isolation. Second, it is instrumental within a new punitive paradigm which began in the 1980s that considers security the fundamental aim of the prison system: there is an idea that security can be more efficiently and cost-effectively ensured through group management.

This second idea is grounded in the theorization of the concepts of "dynamic security," "risk environment" and "daily social order." While "dynamic security" encourages relationship and collectiveness as instrumental principles for a "good and efficient" prison service, an associated risk remains.[82] As soon as people are not locked in their individual cells and are given rights of association and movement, there is a risk that violence will arise more easily, from day-to-day assaults to the exceptional riot. Reading the prison as a true exemplification of the late-modern construct of a "risk environment," criminologist Anthony Bottoms claims that interpersonal violence is believed to be restrained by "daily social order."[83] He collects data to demonstrate that prisons' environmental conditions – a term that includes physical space as well as societal order and policing – have an influence on the level and the types of interpersonal violence.[84] These environmental conditions are what prison services try to manipulate increasingly through strategies of "situational crime prevention" and "risk management," strategies which include dynamic security and normalization.

There is an emerging idea that order, rather than control, is key in prison – as well as in free society. In this sense order is a dynamic social

equilibrium also “negatively defined as the absence of violence, overt conflict or the imminent threat of the chaotic breakdown of social routines,” while control is just one set of strategies and tactics used to achieve order.[85] Scholarship in criminology has considered the legitimation and top-down reintroduction of association and collectiveness in this context. Critiques are sparked about the outcomes of the risk-assessment and group-management protocols by which imprisoned people are re-socialized. They observe that group management is increasingly based on a process of atomization and individualization of imprisoned people that emphasizes their self-responsibility and individual needs and goals,[86] negating the idea of collective “intentional community buildings.”[87] This leads to a dissolution of solidarity among imprisoned people and a lack of collective negotiation, the opposite of what was intended when the postwar welfare state promoted the re-introduction of social relationships in prisons.

This discussion briefly explains the challenge in re-inserting collectiveness in detention. In the prison house there is certainly a resonance of this discussion, coupled with the optimistic intention of tweaking the prison system as a machine that processes the subject toward self-empowerment and, ultimately, freedom. Being a project based on a group – the fifteen participants, the life coaches, and the society outside in the case of the Belgian transition house – it requires a more sophisticated perpetuation of order, one that is not only based on mere control. Risk environment and normalized environment convene there.

The vision and the methodology applied by the staff in the transition house in Mechelen is fully grounded on group dynamics: “A very important part of the project is the fact that they live together. So, we invest a lot in working together, living together, and open and transparent communication.”[88] It seems that here the interpersonal relationships between imprisoned people and with the outside world are mediated by what remains the most important relationship in contemporary prison: that between the single imprisoned individual and the staff. Group dynamics are coordinated by the life coaches who live in close and active proximity to the participants. They prepare both individual plans and plans for group activities, which are adjusted according to continuous feedback. Household management – like cleaning and cooking – is the very realm where these dynamics are tested, with coaches continuously re-arranging groups and couples dedicated to certain activities, based on their inclinations, interpersonal attitude, and skills.

The Closed Loop of Normalization

In conclusion, the prison house is often welcomed for its esthetic and size, which depart from the monumental and institutionalized character of large prisons. Taking free life as the ultimate model, in the prison house collectiveness is seen as a means to reform and to guarantee a

daily social order, while privacy is a perk that the house's guests have acquired in a long positive trajectory of good behavior and as a needed counterbalance to an otherwise overwhelming collectiveness.

The prison house should be understood as an experiment in choreographed collectiveness and being together in society, reintroduced after the sublimation of privacy. As soon as it was realized that society cannot be totally erased even in the most segregated of buildings (the modern prison), we have turned to strategies to govern prison society that proceeded from rudimentary experiments reproducing the hierarchical patriarchal family structure (the family pavilion) to a more recent sophisticated concert of normalization, coaching, risk assessment, and dynamic security where staff play a key role in continuously rearranging and adjusting the collective life of the house's individualized participants. This is the path passing through the racked auditorium of the modern prison, the family pavilions in Mettray, the kitchens for the four teams at Skejby, and the more dynamic organization of grouping and ungrouping in Mechelen. There is also a path from the individual cell of the modern prison to the shared dormitory in Mettray to the private single bedroom of recent prison houses. The value of privacy (solitude) so strongly conceptualized within the prison cell and apparently abandoned in Mettray's collective sleeping – and also in the reality of overcrowding of many contemporary prisons – has returned, unquestioned and dressed-up as domesticity, in the normalized bedroom of the "prison house."

It is still too early to comment on the balance of privacy and collective life at the transition houses in Enghien and Mechelen. My concern is that the houses, with an ambiguous position in relation to domestic privacy versus solitude, might risk becoming the prototype for yet another sophisticated experiment in choreographed and polished collectiveness. Far from intentional communities based on solidarity, they might only smooth complexity and dismiss conflict in favor of the dream of that daily social order. This doubt lends itself to further interdisciplinary investigation.

Whilst I believe that a typological critical analysis is needed of small prison houses – like the one attempted here for Skejby, Enghien and Mechelen – this should never be instrumentalized as an atlas of good practices from which free society could learn. Such analysis is meant to reveal how the prison house, in the attempt to resemble normality, might reproduce and hence reinforce it. Or, even further, how by reproducing normality in captivity, it incubates some variants of it that might then be transferred to free society – i.e. strategies of choreographed collectiveness. This is the closed loop of normalization.

I would suggest that, instead of indulging in the dream of a choreographed collectiveness that excludes risk, conflict and complexity, it might be wise for architects to look back, for instance, at the villages for extraordinary people described by Nils Christie in the book *Beyond Loneliness and Institution: Communes for Extraordinary people* (Figure 8).[89]

Written by a prison abolitionist and key figure of the restorative justice movement, this book can be read as a manifesto against normalization and integration. It challenges these very principles, together with the notions of “deviant” and “mainstream.” As a counter-argument, Christie enthusiastically and ironically describes the Norwegian villages for “idiots, mad and bad” as a necessary moment of suspension in the debate about practices of justice, care and life in society.[90] The ordinary life of the village, says Christie, deliberately detaches itself from the industrial society outside and in particular from the city as its ultimate manifestation, in the search for a social form that is instead nurtured by the extraordinary qualities of its inhabitants. The villages “display ways of living outside the range of what we call normal. They highlight the problematic of time, leisure, labor of ordinary society” and of many of its untouchable values, such as privacy.[91]

Here are echoed some of the lessons put forward by another protagonist of the anti-institutional movement, Italian psychiatrist Franco

Figure 8
“Beyond Loneliness and Institutions: Communes for Extraordinary People.” Nils Christie claims that the villages are like a painting by Bruegel, where every individual stands out as a character escaping categorization and in charge of his own life and of the collective life of the village. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, 1559 (© KHM-Museumsverband).

Basaglia. For Basaglia, the extraordinary can be productive in problematizing normality – evidently a very different take from the mainstream acclaim given to normalization. To dare to go even further, this could be a springboard toward rethinking how we might live collectively and convivially, to use Ivan Illich's term; toward rethinking given definitions of the individual and the collective beyond their "normal" (or, better, "normalized") reality and conceptualization, and beyond the dream of fair cohabitation and politically correct social mix, where a mono-directional pedagogic flow is envisioned from "good normal citizens" to "idiots, mad and bad." In a society that re-values the extraordinary as a constituent, the need for normalization in confined societies – and for confinement and incarceration themselves – might then disappear, or at least diminish as a consequence.

Sabrina Puddu is an architect, educator and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Researcher at KU Leuven, Department of Architecture. Her recent research project "Territories of Incarceration" looks at the architecture of prisons and agrarian penal colonies from an interdisciplinary perspective. She has taught design and history and theory of architecture at institutions including London's Royal College of Art and Central Saint Martins, Leeds Beckett University, and the University of Cagliari. For the Architectural Association she runs the Visiting School Asinara on a former prison island and at KU Leuven she teaches the design studio "This is not a prison farm. Vacant farmland for the settlement of an imperfect community" envisioning proposals for residential farms whose convivial cohabitation is based on principles of restorative and environmental justice.

Acknowledgements

This essay is an outcome of the research project "Territories of Incarceration," which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 844184. My sincere gratitude goes to the scholars and practitioners from KU Leuven Department of Architecture, Vrije Universiteit Brussel Criminology Department, and the NGOs De Huizen and Rescaled who have all contributed to and commented on this work in research workshops, email exchanges and informal conversations.

ORCID

Sabrina Puddu http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1579-9786

Notes

1. "Penology" is the "study of punishment of crime and of prison management," *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). The qualification "to the extent possible" reflects the impossibility for normal

conditions of life to be fully replicated in captivity. “Normality can … never be complete. Prison life will always be an unusual life,” writes prison governor Hans Jørgen Engbo, “Normalization in Nordic Prisons. From a Prison Governor’s Perspective,” in *Scandinavian Penal History, Culture and Prison Practice: Embraced by the Welfare State?* ed. Peter Scharff Smith and Thomas Ugelvik (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 337. The specification that prison life should emulate the positive aspects of life in free society finds a recent formulation in the Council of Europe’s European Prison Rules 2006, Rule 5: “Life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community.” Council of Europe, *European Prison Rules* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006). Scholars and policy advisors Dirk van Zyl Smit and Sonja Snacken further explain that we should avoid bringing inside the prison the social inequalities that characterize free society – see their *Principles of European Prison Law and Policy: Penology and Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105.

2. Engbo, “Normalization in Nordic Prisons,” 343.
3. H. De Vos, “The Normalization Principle. A New Perspective on Imprisonment: Comparative Research on the Development and Interpretation of the Normalization Principle and its Impact on the Theory and Practice of Punishment” (Ph.D. diss., KU Leuven Faculteit Rechtsgeleerdheid, 2021), 25.
4. See, for instance, Local Time, *Design Guide for Small-Scale Local Facilities. Design Guidelines for Evidence-Based, Best-Practice Youth Justice Facilities in Victoria* (Melbourne, Victoria: Local Time, 2019). Available online: https://localtime264843868.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/localtime_designguide_v1-2.pdf (accessed March 2022).
5. It was in conversation with David Cayley that Ivan Illich described the prison as a double of society, referring to correction officers as “cardinals” or “pontiffs” who “preside [over] and organize an extraordinary ceremony in society.” The prison, Illich says, acts “as a huge ritual which creates a scapegoat which we can drive out into the desert” – see David Cayley, “Prison and its Alternative, Ideas” (1996), podcast: https://www.davidcayley.com/podcasts/2015/6/8/prison-and-its-alternatives-part-five (accessed March 2022).
6. By “home-ification” I mean the deliberate design act of making the interior of institutions homely, of taking the “home” as a positive, harmless reference.
7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977[1975]); Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue. English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
8. From a semi-structured interview conducted with a resident of Pension Skejby on March 6, 2014, by student in anthropology N. De Haan, “Meeting Halfway. Experiences of Convicts and Non-Convicts Living Together in a Danish Halfway House” (Bachelor diss., Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Utrecht University, 2014), 41.
9. Ibid., 41.
10. Linda Kjær Minke, “The Effects of Mixing Offenders with Non-Offenders: Findings from a Danish Quasi-Experiment,” *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 12, no. 1 (2011): 96.
11. Ibid.
12. This is a remark from Linda Kjær Minke in an online conversation with the author, November 10, 2021.
13. Linda Kjær Minke, *Skejby-modellen. Et socialt eksperiment om udtynding af kriminelle. En kvalitativ og kvantitativ evaluering* (Report for the Danish Ministry of Justice of Denmark, 2006): 22 (my translation). Available online: https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/da/publications/skejby-modellen-et-socialt-eksperiment-om-udtynding-af-kriminelle (accessed March, 2022).
14. Ibid.
15. See, for instance, De Vos, “The Normalization Principle,” 43.
16. Ibid., 44.
17. Engbo, “Normalization in Nordic Prisons,” 343.

18. Ibid., 338.
19. Bengt Nirje and Wolf Wolfensberger, "Reflections on the History of Normalization" (lecture, Syracuse University, Department of Special Education, Syracuse, NY, May 28, 2003), available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wctGjC7x94 (accessed March 2022).
20. See Act no. 192, June 5, 1959. Bank-Mikkelsen's definition is quoted in Bengt Nirje, "The Normalization Principle and Its Human Management Implications," *The International Social Role Valorization Journal* 1, no. 2 (1994[1969]): 19 (revised edition).
21. Bengt Nirje, "The Normalization Principle" (revised ed.): 19.
22. Ibid., 21–22.
23. Wolf Wolfensberger, *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services* (Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1972): 12–25. Wolfensberger describes a historical trajectory for the "deviant" individual, and looks at the names formerly given to that individual: a "subhuman organism," a "menace," an "unspeakable object of dread," an "object of pity," a "holy innocent," a "diseased organism," an "object of ridicule," and an "eternal child."
24. Ibid., 45.
25. Ibid., 28.
26. Ibid.
27. See for instance A. Culham and M. Nind, "Deconstructing Normalization: Clearing the Way for Inclusion," *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 28, no. 1 (2003): 65–78. Available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/1366825031000086902 (accessed March, 2022). Culham and Nind note how Wolfensberger will later become aware of this controversy. Blaming the very term "normalization" for its tendency to be easily misunderstood, in the 1980s he will propose changing it to "Social Role Valorization."
28. Ibid., 71.
29. For an insight into the history of the principle of normalization in penology, see Helene de Vos' doctoral work, "The Normalization Principle."
30. Council of Europe, *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*, 1973: Art.58, 34; United Nations, *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*, 1955: Art.60, 9.
31. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago: Aldine, 1961).
32. Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958). Sykes described the "pains of imprisonment" as: deprivation of liberty, deprivation of autonomy, deprivation of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual relationships and deprivation of security.
33. De Vos, "The Normalization Principle," 4, 35.
34. Ibid., 35.
35. Ibid., 39–48.
36. Ibid., 44.
37. Ibid., 314.
38. Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen, "A metropolitan area in Denmark: Copenhagen," in *Changing patterns in residential services for the mentally retarded*, ed. Robert B. Kugel and Wolf Wolfensberger (Washington, DC: President's Committee on Mental Retardation, 1969), 227–254; Bengt Nirje, "The Normalization Principle and Its Human Management Implications," 20–21.
39. Wolfensberger, *The Principle of Normalization*, 79.
40. Ibid., 80–81. An environment that aims at a "low common denominator" is a space designed with restrictions and specific features appropriate only to a small part of the population, unnecessary for most.
41. This section is based on primary research conducted in the past three years. I have engaged in conversation and collaborated with members of the NGOs De Huizen and Rescaled and participated in the NGOs' seminars and training sessions. Data regarding the Enghien and Mechelen Transition houses were collected from official sources and media, as well as in interviews with visitors to the houses and a workshop

with the Coordinator of the Mechelen Transition House.

42. Kristel Beyens et al., *The Houses. Towards a Sustainable Penitentiary Approach* (Ghent: vzw De Huizen, 2017).
43. Ibid. These proposals, which were published in the book, are by Belgian architect Ronald De Meyer and his Masters students at UGent. Recently, more architects and architectural students following De Huizen/Rescaled are adding to this discussion with proposals for detention houses. See, for instance, the work by Johanne Dalemark (https://www.wayback.no/et-soningssted/) and Mélanie Bouteille (https://farapej.fr/Projet-pilote). In the faculty of Architecture at KU Leuven, De Huizen’s proposals have been translated into architectural projects for students under the guidance of Gideon Boie: see http://www.prisongear.be/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=51&cntnt01returnid=1.
44. Mateo Kries et al., eds., *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective* (Vitra Design Museum/Berlin: Ruby Press, 2017), 38–39.
45. G4S Care is a branch of G4S - Group 4 Securitas, an international private security firm founded in 1992 in the UK. Today it manages private prisons and detention centers globally. An ever-increasing list of scandals means that has been denounced in several detention institutions. Yet G4S holds the monopoly in the field of private detention and their established curriculum was key to the award of the contract for running the two Belgian transition houses.
46. By replacing “detention houses” with “transition houses,” where people nearing the end of their sentence are “transitioning” to freedom, the Belgian National Prison Service is expanding rather than shrinking. The new transition houses for low-risk convicted people are being opened concomitantly with new gigantic prison complexes on the peripheries of Belgian cities. The most recent instance of this trend in prison estates is the construction of the Haren Prison Complex on the outskirts of Brussels which will be fully in operation by the end of 2022 to host nearly 1,200 prisoners.
47. Manu Pintelon, “Belgium Takes First Step towards a New Penitentiary Paradigm: The Use of Transition Houses,” Rescaled Blog, June 6, 2020, https://www.rescaled.org/2020/06/06/belgium-takes-first-step-towards-a-new-penitentiary-paradigm-the-use-of-transition-houses/ (accessed March 2022).
48. Bart Somers, Mechelen’s mayor, reported in the official website of the former Minister of Justice Koen Geens: https://www.koengeens.be/news/2019/09/09/eerste-belgische-transitiehuis-opent-deuren-in-mechelen (accessed March 2022).
49. It must be noted that these 17 places in the transition house are very limited in comparison to the total number of people detained in Flanders – about 5000 – and in the whole Belgium – about 10,000.
50. The Coordinator of the Transition House in Mechelen, in discussion with the author (November 2020) explains how they have invested in establishing this relationship, inviting neighbors into the house for informal events and information sessions, and providing services for and support to the adjacent retirement home during the covid-19 crisis. Exceptions to the general praise received by the project are comments from the blog *Civis Mundi*: coming from a prison abolitionist perspective, *Civis Mundi* argues that the buildings should have been used instead as affordable housing, thus responding to Belgium’s severe housing crisis. Goukens Lode, “Transitiehuis Tegen Institutionalisering,” *Civis Mundi*, 87 (2019). Available online: https://www.civismundi.nl/index.php?p=artikel&aid=5315 (accessed March 2022).
51. The two buildings belong to the city and are rented by the Ministry of Justice/G4S. They were previously used as a winter shelter for the homeless. In summer 2019, they were redecorated and furnished for the new purpose.
52. “Het is zomaar een huis in de rij,” quoted in “Hier verlang ik opnieuw naar

morgen," *De Standaard*, February 22, 2020. Available online: https://traliesuitdeweg.weebly.com/eerste-transitiehuis-in-mechelen.html (accessed March 2022).

53. Official Household Rules, VI Material Terms of Life and VI.1 Room and living area(s) (my translation) published on the official website of De Huizen: https://dehuizen.be/files/Huishoudelijk_reglement_transitiehuis__Mechelen.pdf (accessed November 2020)
54. From the official website of the Belgian Ministry of Justice (my translation): https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/nieuws/persberichten_89 (accessed November 2020).
55. In November 2020 only two guests were hosted in Enghien; it has a full capacity of about 15. In January 2022, the transition house suspended its operation but it is expected to reopen before the end of 2022 under new management.
56. A staff member at Pentonville prison, in discussion with the author, November 2017.
57. Anon, "Boil in a bag pigeon," *InsideTime – The National Newspaper for Prisoners and Detainees*, October 1, 2013. Available online: https://insidetime.org/boil-in-a-bag-pigeon/ (accessed March 2022).
58. Sabrina Puddu, "Prisons and Food: From in-Cell Eating and Meal-Lines to Collective and Domestic Kitchens," Penal Reform International Blog, June 2, 2020, https://www.penalreform.org/blog/prisons-and-food-from-in-cell-eating-and/ (accessed March 2022).
59. Anna Puigjaner, "Bringing the Kitchen Out of the House," E-Flux Architecture Blog, February 11, 2019, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/221624/bringing-the-kitchen-out-of-the-house// (accessed March 2022).
60. The Coordinator of Transition House in Mechelen, in discussion with the author, November 2020.
61. Interviewed by a local newspaper, the house coordinator of Mechelen declared that the focus in the house "is on recovery and learning to live together" after the distorted experience of collective living that imprisoned people have in prisons. "Hier verlang ik opnieuw naar morgen," *De Standaard*, February 22, 2020.
62. The videos were filmed by the regional television channels RTV and NOTELE. Available online: https://www.rtv.be/artikels/transitiehuis-lijkt-helemaal-niet-op-een-gevangenis-a72848; https://www.notele.be/it18-media73563-la-premiere-maison-de-transition-de-wallonie-a-ete-inauguree-a-enghien.html?fbclid=IwAR1JzYsmLhIT1IAnEAk4q13uoiNN0xmdUbWzLZJVF1CcLtU79fNhkFJsG9E; https://www.notele.be/it61-media73593-la-maison-de-transition-d-enghien- inauguree-en-presence-du-ministre-de-la-justice-koen-geens.html (accessed March 2022).
63. The Coordinator of the Transition House in Mechelen, in discussion with the author, November 2020.
64. Ibid.
65. Thomas Ugelvik, *Power and Resistance in Prison: Doing Time, Doing Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
66. Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight, eds. *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
67. Dogma, "Ichnographia Cellae," *Confinement*, ed. gta exhibitions and e-flux Architecture (2020), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/confinement/352071/ichnographia-cellae/ (accessed March, 2022).
68. The quote is taken from a summary in http://www.dogma.name/project/the-room-of-ones-own/ (accessed March 2022). See also Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara, *Dogma: The Room of One's Own: The Architecure of the (Private) Room* (Milano: Black Square, 2017).
69. Helen Johnston, "'The Solitude of the Cell:' Cellular Confinement in the Emergence of the Modern Prison, 1850–1930," in *The Prison Cell*, ed. Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 23–44.
70. Thomas Ugelvik, *Power and Resistance in Prison,* 113–129.
71. Jana Robberechts and Kristel Beyens, "PrisonCloud: The Beating Heart of the

Digital Prison Cell,” in *The Prison Cell*, ed. Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

72. Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
73. This is the argument advanced by sociologist Richard Sennett. See, for instance: Richard Sennett, “Interiors and Interiority” (public lecture, Harvard GSD, Cambridge, MA, April 22, 2016). Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=53&v=hVPjQhfJfKo (accessed March, 2022).
74. Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue,* 406.
75. Ibid., 354.
76. Ibid., 71.
77. Ibid., 404.
78. Ibid., 406.
79. Helen Johnston, “‘The Solitude of the Cell’,” 30.
80. Ibid., 31.
81. Council of Europe, *European Prison Rules*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2006.The Rules describe both privacy and collectiveness as fundamental rights and seem to suggest that a normalized condition is one ensuring a healthy balance between the two. While the “modern prison” aimed to break association, Rule 27 of the European Prison Rules states the importance for imprisoned people to develop “their social and interpersonal skills.” Rule 50 claims that “unnecessary restrictions to prisoners’ rights to communicate” must be avoided. Rule 18, specifically concerned with “accommodation,” refers to the 11th General Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 2011, on the undesirability of large-capacity dormitories, in favour of single cells. The document specifies that “single cells at night do not imply a limit on association during the day. The benefit of privacy during sleeping hours needs to be balanced with the benefit of human contact at other times.”
82. British prison reformer and member of the British Prison Service Ian Malcolm Dunbar theorised this concept in the 1980s as a reaction to some recent riots in high security British prisons. In 1985 he published the report: U.K. Home Office, *A Sense of Direction. Report by Ian Dunbar* (London: H.M.P. Leyhill: 1985). Here, “relationship” is defined as the “effective interaction between individuals (or the combination of people within the organization),” where “effective” means the “maximum achievement of aims with the minimum resources” (137). Dunbar states that the key relationship in prison is that between the staff member and the imprisoned person. If this is successful, control and security will flow naturally and effectively. He considers architectural design fundamental to encourage informal contact between staff and prisoners to intermingle, and suggests that the institutional unity of large monobloc prisons should be fragmented into small housing units (22) for a small “manageable group” of about 75 people (42).
83. See Richard Sparks, Anthony Bottoms and Will Hay, *Prisons and the Problem of Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32–96, in particular 90, also Anthony E. Bottoms, “Interpersonal Violence and Social Order in Prisons,” *Crime and Justice* 26 (1999): 205–281.
84. Anthony E. Bottoms, “Interpersonal Violence and Social Order in Prisons,” 213.
85. “Order: an orderly situation is any long-standing pattern of social relations (characterized by a minimum level of respect for persons) in which the expectations that participants have of one another are commonly met, though not necessarily without contestation. Order can also, in part, be defined negatively … . Control: the use of routines and of a variety of formal and informal practices - especially, but not only, sanctions - which assist in the maintenance of order, whether or not they are recognized as doing so.” Ibid., 251.
86. Criminologist Ben Crewe observes that the prison is today governed through the “dissolution of the social” with the atomization and individualization of imprisoned people key to maintain order in prison. Ben Crewe, *The Prisoner*

Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison*. Clarendon Studies in Criminology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

87. M. Talay and B. Pali, “Encountering the C Wing: The Relationship Between Prisoner Self-Governance and ‘Pains of Imprisonment’,” *Criminological Encounters* 3, no.1 (2020): 117. This ethnographic study was conducted in the open regime wing at the “modern prison” of Mechelen, the prison where most people were held in detention before being transferred to the Mechelen transition house. It observes a “deprivation of community,” paradoxically in an open-regime prison wing where the time spent in communal spaces outside the cell surpasses that spent locked in the cell.
88. The Coordinator of the Transition House in Mechelen, in discussion with the author, November 2020.
89. Nils Christie, *Beyond Loneliness and Institutions: Communes for Extraordinary People* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007[1989]).
90. Ibid., 28.
91. This is David Cayley’s description of the villages. David Cayley, “Beyond Institutions, Nils Christie, Ideas” (1994) podcast: https://www.davidcayley.com/podcasts/2015/8/17/beyond-institutions-part-six (accessed March 2022).

References

- Anon. “Hier verlang ik opnieuw naar morgen.” *De Standaard*, February 22, 2020. Available online: https://traliesuitdeweg.weebly.com/eerste-transitiehuis-in-mechelen.html.
- Anon. 2013. “Boil in a Bag Pigeon.” *InsideTime – The National Newspaper for Prisoners and Detainees*, October 1. Available online: https://insidetime.org/boil-in-a-bag-pigeon/.
- Aureli, Pier Vittorio and Martino Tattara. 2017. *Dogma: The Room of One’s Own: The Architecture of the (Private) Room*. Milano: Black Square. http://www.dogma.name/project/the-room-of-ones-own/.
- Bank-Mikkelsen, Niels Erik. 1969. “A Metropolitan area in Denmark: Copenhagen.” In *Changing Patterns in Residential Services for the Mentally Retarded*, edited by Robert B. Kugel and Wolf Wolfensberger, 227–254. Washington, DC: President’s Committee on Mental Retardation. Available online: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6gtM0mcmza4C&pg=PA245&lpg=PA245&dq=Danish±Act±No.±192±of±5±June,±1959&source=bl&ots=wIfkZktu4c&sig=ACfU3U14GJNpj495x9vmWG81-mr_xfSiTw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjGl9yDy772AhXMUMAKHayHDd-cQ6AF6BAgZEAM#v=onepage&q=let%20&f=false.
- Beyens, Kristel, Ronny De Meyer, Marjan Gryson and Liesbeth Naessens. 2017. *The Houses. Towards a Sustainable Penitentiary Approach*. Ghent: vzw De Huizen.
- Bottoms, Anthony E. 1999. “Interpersonal Violence and Social Order in Prisons,” *Crime and Justice* 26: 205–281. doi:10.1086/449298
- Cayley, David. 1994. “Beyond Institutions, Nils Christie, Ideas” (podcast). Available online: https://www.davidcayley.com/podcasts/2015/8/17/beyond-institutions-part-six.
- Cayley, David. 1996. “Prison and its Alternative, Ideas” (podcast). Available online: http://www.davidcayley.com/podcasts/category/Prison%2FIts+Alternatives.
- Christie, Nils. 2007[1989]. *Beyond Loneliness and Institutions: Communes for Extraordinary People*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.
- *Concise Oxford Dictionary.* 1982 (seventh edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Council of Europe. 1973. *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Council of Europe. 2006. *European Prison Rules*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Crewe, Ben. 2009. *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison*. Clarendon Studies in

Criminology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Culham, A., and M. Nind. 2003. “Deconstructing Normalisation: Clearing the Way for Inclusion.” *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 28, no. 1: 65–78. Available online: doi:10.1080/1366825031000086902
- De Haan, N. 2014. “Meeting Halfway. Experiences of Convicts and Non-Convicts Living Together in a Danish Halfway House.” Bachelor diss., Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Utrecht University.
- De Vos, Helene. 2021. “The Normalization Principle. A New Perspective on Imprisonment: Comparative Research on the Development and Interpretation of the Normalization Principle and its Impact on the Theory and Practice of Punishment.” Ph.D. diss., KU Leuven Faculteit Rechtsgeleerdheid.
- Dogma. 2020. “Ichnographia Cellae,” *Confinement*, edited by gta exhibitions and e-flux Architecture. https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/confinement/352071/ichnographia-cellae/.
- Engbo, Hans Jørgen. 2017. “Normalisation in Nordic Prisons. From a Prison Governor’s Perspective.” In *Scandinavian Penal History, Culture and Prison Practice: Embraced by the Welfare State*? edited by Peter Scharff Smith and Thomas Ugelvik, 327–352. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Evans, Robin. 1982. *The Fabrication of Virtue. English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977[1975]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Johnston, Helen. 2020. “‘The Solitude of the Cell’: Cellular Confinement in the Emergence of the Modern Prison, 1850-1930.” In *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration*, edited by Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight, 23–44. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kries, Mateo, Mathias Müller, Daniel Niggli, Andreas Ruby, Ilka Ruby, eds. 2017. *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective*. Vitra Design Museum/Berlin: Ruby Press.
- Local Time. 2019. *Design Guide for Small-Scale Local Facilities. Design Guidelines for Evidence-Based, Best-Practice Youth Justice Facilities in Victoria*. Melbourne, Victoria: Local Time. Available online: https://localtime264843868.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/localtime_designguide_v1-2.pdf.
- Lode, Goukens. 2019. “Transitiehuis Tegen Institutionalisering,” Civis Mundi, 87. Available online: https://www.civismundi.nl/index.php?p=artikel&aid=5315.
- Minke, Linda Kjær. 2006. *Skejby-modellen. Et socialt eksperiment om udtynding af kriminelle. En kvalitativ og kvantitativ evaluering*. Report for the Danish Ministry of Justice. Available online: https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/da/publications/skejby-modellen-et-socialt-eksperiment-om-udtynding-af-kriminelle.
- Minke, Linda Kjær. 2011 “The Effects of Mixing Offenders with Non-Offenders: Findings from a Danish Quasi-Experiment.” *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 12 (1): 80–99. doi:10.1080/14043858.2011.561624
- Nirje, Bengt. 1994[1969]. “The Normalization Principle and Its Human Management Implications.” *The International Social Role Valorization Journal* 1, no. 2: 19–23.
- Nirje, Bengt and Wolf Wolfensberger. 2003. “Reflections on the History of Normalization.” Lecture, Syracuse University, Department of Special Education, Syracuse, NY, May 28. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wctGjC7x94.
- NOTELE. 2020. *La maison de transition d’Enghien inaugurée en présence du ministre de la Justice Koen Geens.* Television news video, January 14. Available online: https://www.notele.be/it61-media73593-la-maison-de-transition-d-enghien-inauguree-en-presence-du-ministre-de-la-justice-koen-geens.html.
- NOTELE. 2020. *La première maison de transition de Wallonie a été inaugurée à Enghien.* Television news video, January 14. Available online: https://www.notele.be/it18-media73563-la-premiere-maison-de-transition-de-wallonie-a-ete-inauguree-a-enghien.html?fbclid= IwAR1JzYsmLh

IT1IAnEAk4q13uoiNN0xmdUbWzLZJVF1Cc LtU79fNhkFJsG9E.
- Pintelon, Manu. 2020. "Belgium Takes First Step towards a New Penitentiary Paradigm: The Use of Transition Houses." Rescaled Blog, June 6, https://www.rescaled.org/2020/06/06/belgium-takes-first-step-towards-a-new-penitentiary-paradigm-the-use-of-transition-houses/.
- Puddu, Sabrina. 2021. "Prisons and Food: From in-Cell Eating and Meal-Lines to Collective and Domestic Kitchens." Penal Reform International Blog, June 2, https://www.penalreform.org/blog/prisons-and-food-from-in-cell-eating-and/.
- Puigjaner, Anna. 2019. "Bringing the Kitchen Out of the House." E-Flux Architecture Blog, February 11. https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/221624/bringing-the-kitchen-out-of-the-house//.
- Rice, Charles. 2007. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. New York: Routledge.
- Robberechts, Jana, and Kristel Beyens. 2020. "PrisonCloud: The Beating Heart of the Digital Prison Cell." In *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration*, edited by Jennifer Turner and Victoria Knight, 283–303. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- RTV. 2019. *Transitiehuis lijkt 'helemaal niet' op een gevangenis*. Television program, September 9. Available online: https://www.rtv.be/artikels/transitiehuis-lijkt-helemaal-niet-op-een-gevangenis-a72848.
- Sennett, Richard. 2016. "Interiors and Interiority." Public lecture, Harvard GSD, Cambridge, MA, April 22. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=53&v=hVPjQhfJfKo.
- Sparks, Richard, Anthony Bottoms and Will Hay. 1996. *Prisons and the Problem of Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sykes, Gresham M. 1958. *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Talay, M., and B. Pali. 2020. "Encountering the C Wing: The Relationship Between Prisoner Self-Governance and 'Pains of Imprisonment'." *Criminological Encounters* 3, no. 1: 106–120.
- Turner, Jennifer, and Victoria Knight, eds. 2020. *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- U.K. Home Office. 1985. *A Sense of Direction*. Report by Ian Dunbar. London: Printed at H.M.P. Leyhill.
- Ugelvik, Thomas. 2014. *Power and Resistance in Prison: Doing Time, Doing Freedom*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- United Nations. 1955. "Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners." https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/UN_Standard_Minimum_Rules_for_the_Treatment_of_Prisoners.pdf
- Van Zyl Smit, Dirk, and Sonja Snacken. 2009. *Principles of European Prison Law and Policy: Penology and Human Rights*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfensberger, Wolf. 1972. *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services*. Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation.