

Ireen CHRISTINE WINTER, Ph.D.*

Senior researcher at the Institute for Criminology and Criminal Law,
University of Vienna

THE NEW LEOBEN INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE – A MODEL ON TRIAL

“Full Prisons,” “No Rooms Free in Lockup,” “The Austrian Prisons are Ripping at the Seams” — These kind of blunt headlines are regularities in the yellow press. Academia and legal firms are talking about “overfilling becoming the universal norm.” In March 2008 approximately 8,800 people were incarcerated in Austrian correctional facilities; in May, 2006 it reached over 9,000 people. In light of the Austrian population of 8.3 Million, this means there were 105 inmates for every 100,000 citizen in 2007. In Germany the rate reaches 95 and Switzerland only 83 inmates per 100,000 residents.

The Austrian Federal Ministry responded to the long standing critique against the inadequate detention conditions in overfilled penal institutions by building a new, larger prison as part of Justice Center in Leoben with an integrated local and regional court as well as a district attorney’s office. The prison complex in Styria – built on the foundations of the run down Dominican monastery, which had been used as a prison since the 1950s — was awarded the Austrian Architecture Prize and was opened and fully operational in March 2005. Since then it is been as the most secure and modern Prison institution in Austria.

DARK AND CRAMPED QUARTERS GIVE WAY TO BRIGHT AND CLEAR INTERIOR DESIGN

As a result of the move to the new building, the accommodations for inmates and employees have changed drastically. Lightless, crowded rooms, low hallways and cells with tiny windows close to the ceiling gave the old prison the classic image of a conventional, dreary jailhouse from 1900. One of the main problems was the predominant use of six-person prison cells, which was far from meeting the current engineering standards. The new complex distinguishes itself through its pavilion-like construction and transparent fundamental structure (industrial glass), which is reminiscent of a modern urban-development on a smaller scale. Systems of glass tunnels, compact administration and supply systems as well as neighboring

* ireen.friedrich@univie.ac.at

visitation and detention facilities create a symbiosis of imprisonment and everyday life on multiple floors. The maximum capacity of the new prison is 205 inmates (men, women and teenagers with detention terms up to 18 months), which exceeds the capacity of the old building (128 inmates) by 60%. The entire complex, all 166 rooms plus the neighboring court and district attorney's office reflect an investment of approximately €46.7 million. Among other things this was made possible by the fact that the justice administration set new service-oriented correctional standards when it comes to the formal requirements of detention facilities. For the first time in Austria the topic of "Art and Construction" in Prison was taken into consideration. The range of rooms is meant to be value-oriented, providing "the most freedom of movement for the inmates within the confines of imprisonment." Multifunctional and flexible furniture with personal shower facilities verify these intentions.

ART IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HIGHEST OF SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

A great portion of this new interior design concept consists of the variety of artistic innovations, which were included in the planning of the prison, thanks to well-known artists who chose to work on the project. These artists produced different functional pieces and creative artwork, inside and on the façade of the prison, e.g. woodwork, wall murals, courtyards and indoor objects, all fashioned under strict surveillance. The new prison therefore reaches the most modern technical safety standards: digital, time-synchronized audio/video-surveillance and sluices as well as transponder closing mechanisms, which have replaced conventional keys. Moreover, the guards can now open and close doors with the click of a mouse. Another important factor is the installation of separate courtyards, in which the inmates cannot see from one into the other (separated by section), with one courtyard situated on the secured rooftop. This concept is also a unique novelty in prison architecture.

RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

A comprehensive evaluation study (PhD) of the inmates' and overseers' situation before and after the move shows just how much the detention circumstances have changed structurally and what advantages and disadvantages have become clear by directly comparing the two institutions. The data was collected in three phases, in which standardized written questionnaires were conducted among the all inmates and overseers present on the day in question. The anonymous and voluntary questionnaires were issued both before (first phase) and after (second phase) the move to the new institution. The inmate response rate to the first enquiry was pleasingly high at approximately 76% (n=97 of 127). Among the wardens present on the day of the questionnaires, the response rate reached 100% (36 of 36). Despite the increase in numbers of inmates (from 128 to 165 inmates) in the new building, the rate of feedback in the second phase only reached 44% (73 of 165 total); the overseers remained at 100% (33 of 33 total). For each group of participants the writ-

ten questionnaire included five sets of questions, separated into A. Inmate accommodations, B. Education opportunities, C. Help and treatment measures, D. Free Time and E. Overall prison climate. In addition, six months after the second written questionnaire, standardized interviews were conducted with 10 inmates and overseers (third phase).

All in all, both groups from the new institution concur that there has been a significant improvement of accommodations and consequently of the inmates' personal quality of life. In fact, the implementation of single prison cells with personal showers was highly praised by all participants. In the old prison there were many complaints about warm water shortages in the group showers. The condition of the walls, floors and doors (indoor view) in old prison building was given a D grade by the inmates and a C- by the staff, whereas the interior design of the new institution was given an A- on average. For instance, in the old penal institution 75% of the inmates and 44% of the overseers wanted more daylight, whereas in the new institution only 2% of the inmates and none of the overseers felt in need of more daylight.

INTERIOR DESIGN

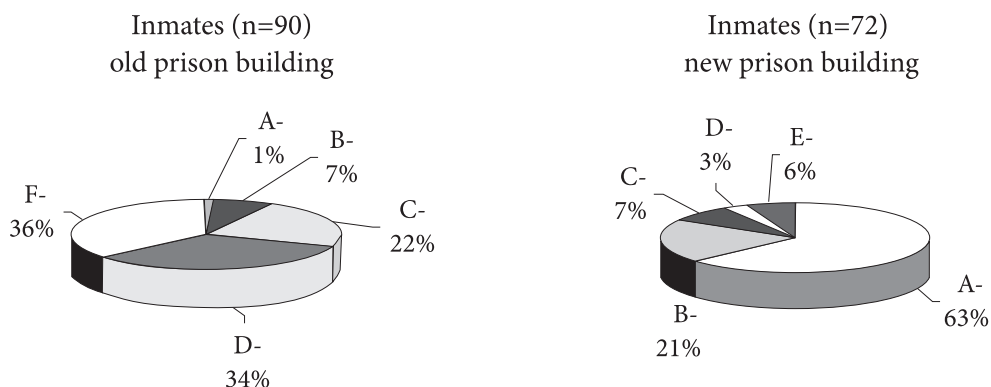


Fig. 2: Ø Grade: D Fig. 3: Ø Grade: A-

The questionnaire regarding reactions to the implementation of visual art in the prison yielded enlightening results. Both in the written and in the oral questionnaire the majority of the inmates found the addition of artistic to prison life to be “good” while the prison staff was rather critical and restrained. When asked why, it became clear that the majority of the staff interpreted the term “art” quite differently and partially saw it as a “waste of money.” However, approximately 90% of the staff and 60% of the inmates stated that the artistically designed visiting areas are “very good” or “good.”

The last set of questions had to do with how environment is experienced in the new prison. Many inmates felt that they were much better treated by the staff in

the new institution, and even stated that there were fewer conflicts and arguments among inmates. According to all those questioned, this is due to the implementation of single cells. These provide the inmates with opportunities for retreat, creating more personal privacy. The mood among the inmates is much less heated than in the old prison. In the new institution there is much more recreation space and room to keep out of each other's way. All wardens stated that the overall more generous accommodations in the new prison lead to relaxation and a lessening of aggression among the inmates, but also helped with their relationship to the staff, although 46% of the inmates stated that the behavior of the inmates towards each other was "very good" or "good" in the old institution. However, 65% of the inmates see the inter-inmate relations in the new prison as "very good" or "good".

TECHNOLOGY CANNOT REPLACE PEOPLE

The new prison in Leoben is groundbreaking in its construction. Architecture as a supporting element, art as part of public (free) life, even in prison, as well as security inside and out combine to form the foundation of this prison concept. The efforts of the justice department to develop humane detention facilities, as close as possible to life in freedom, have been realized very positively here. The results of empirical studies have shown that designing interior elements in a violence-preventive fashion has a positive effect on the overall prison climate, among the inmates for one, but also among the overseers. Besides the construction of high quality living and detention facilities, the supervision of the inmates by trained staff should not be forgotten. The questionnaires indicate that personal contacts are important to the inmates. The accommodations make a significant difference in the inmates' well being and therefore support the maintenance of a relaxed atmosphere (also an important security factor). The overseers are the only contacts to the "outside," besides the staff of social services and psychotherapy.

In conclusion, a combination of supportive interior design, security technology and supervision by personnel – opposed to restrictive detention – is a step in the right direction. The available technology and architecture should support and complement the work of the overseers in a meaningful way and not replace them by isolating the inmates completely. This seems to be becoming increasingly difficult in the new institution since the number of overseers has stayed the same even though the number of inmates has risen drastically at the same time. In 2005, the overseer/inmate ratio was 1:2.35 and in 2007 it was 1:3.76. Therefore it is important to make sure that the positive concept of the institution doesn't backfire. Because of the lack of personnel, the non-use of the new costly resources (sports facilities, educational facilities, computer rooms) could cause financial difficulties.

It is therefore a matter of time before it becomes clear how Austrian prison construction will continue in light of rising imprisonment rates. The progressive beginnings and courageous innovations in the new prison in Leoben should be taken into account and expanded when planning the construction of further penal institutions. In "therapeutic detention" It would be desirable that high security mechanisms and

digital surveillance systems do not cause a shortening of personnel. It is an undisputed fact that even the best technology cannot replace people. When incarceration is necessary by law, the constant improvement of accommodations should be the main objective, as in the case of the Leoben “model institution on trial.”

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Dr Ireen *CHRISTINE WINTER*

Viši saradnik na Institutu za kriminologiju i krivično pravo,
Univerzitet u Beču

NOVI INSTITUT PRAVDE U LEOBENU – PROBNI MODEL

Rezime

U poslednjoj deceniji u Austriji je došlo do naglog porasta zatvoreničke populacije koja je u jednom trenutku obuhvatala broj od oko 9 000 ljudi. Kontinuirano povećanje broja osuđenih lica bilo je praćeno lošim i neadekvatnim zatvorskim uslovima. Država je na brojne prigovore i kritike zbog prenatrpanosti zatvora odredovala građenjem Pravosudnog centra u Leobenu u čijem se sastavu pored suda i kancelarije javnog tužioca nalazi i najmoderniji i najbolje obezbeđen zatvor u Austriji. Zatvor je sagrađen na mestu gde se nekada nalazio manastir koji je od 1950-ih godina bio korišćen u svrhe zatvaranja osuđenika.

Za razliku od predašnjeg kao i od drugih zatvora širom Austrije, u novom zatvorskom kompleksu više ne postoje male, skućene, pretrpane i slabo osvetljene ćelije u kojima je do nedavno bilo smešteno i po šest osoba. Novi zatvor je izgrađen u modernom i urbanom stilu sa dominantnom upotrebom stakla da bi se postigla transparentnost. Zatvorenici imaju brojne pogodnosti što zajedno sa ostalim prednostima ovog zdanja stvara svojevrsnu simbiozu zatvoreničkog i svakodnevnog života na slobodi. Kapacitet zatvora je 205 zatvorenika (pri čemu postoje odeljenja i za maloletnike i za žene) što je za 60% više u odnosu na prethodni zatvor. Po prvi put je u izgradnji zatvorskog objekta uzeta u obzir i unutrašnja arhitektura što se

može videti po umetnički dizajniranim unutrašnjim i spoljašnjim fasadama kao i odvojenim dvorištima za zatvorenike.

Autorka je sproveda ispitivanje osuđenika sa ciljem utvrđivanja njihovog mišljenja u pogledu novih zatvorskih uslova. Pitanja su bila klasifikovana u nekoliko grupa a ispitivanje (ankete i intervjui) sprovedeni u tri faze. Rezultati pokazuju da je većina zatvorenika zadovoljna novim uslovima u zatvoru, da je dekoracija po njihovom mišljenju dobra kao i da su odnosi između zatvorenika poboljšani i u manjoj meri opterećeni netrpeljivošću i agresijom. Zanimljivo je da su stražari u manjoj meri bili oduševljeni i da su smatrali da je toliko ulaganje u novi zatvor nepotrebno trošenje finansijskih sredstava.

Cilj izgradnje novog zatvora bio je stvaranje povoljnijih uslova za život zatvorenika koji bi bio što približniji uslovima na slobodi. Taj cilj je ostvaren a rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da ulaganje u poboljšanje kvaliteta zatvorskog života dovodi do smanjivanja agresije i stvaranja jedne pozitivnije atmosfere među zatvorenicima. U tom smislu, trebalo bi i dalje raditi na kombinovanju moderne bezbedonosne tehnologije, pogodnog dizajna i nadziranja od strane fizičkog osoblja. Posebnu pažnju treba posvetiti poslednjem faktoru jer u uslovima daljeg porasta zatvoreničke populacije nije poželjno osloniti se samo na tehnologiju koja ne može u potpunosti zameniti stručno osoblje unutar i najmodernijih zatvora.