

Persons at risk during interrogations in police custody

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Valorisation

Addendum

The most important implications for police interviewing practices and suggestions for future research are already discussed in the General discussion in Chapter Seven. Therefore, in this Valorisation addendum I will focus on how research in the field of environmental psychology may be used to redesign and improve police detention centre environments.

In 2015, I asked Kate Pietrowska, who was then a Master's student Interior Design at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HKU) in Utrecht, the Netherlands, to redesign a police detention centre into 'the police detention centre of the future'.²² The object of the redesign was the police detention centre Mijkenbroek, Breda, the Netherlands, built in the 90's of the past century. The following is part of her Master's thesis, called 'Humanisation of Cell Complexes: Creating Balance between Equality and Hierarchy' (Pietrowska, 2015).

Before the start of the design, I helped Kate to formulate four areas of research, which she later subsequently translated into four spatial arrangements: safety for both suspects and staff, order to ensure optimal police work, trust between suspects and police staff, and authority in order to ensure respect and modesty. As she recognized, there is a paradox in designing a humane, comfortable, and respectful space on the one hand, and to maintain a certain level of hierarchy and authority on the other hand (Pietrowska, 2015). Still, the aim was to design a police detention centre where the environment contributes to reduced stress levels in police suspects, and where police staff can carry out their tasks optimally as well.

The design was based on literature review, and a pilot study (i.e., interviews, observations, and surveys). The Theory of Supportive Design (Ulrich, 1991) argues that supportive spaces may reduce stress levels in humans and is nowadays commonly used as the basis for designing health care facilities (as discussed in more detail in Chapter Six). In addition, empirical research showed that when people lose their sense of control, their stress levels increase (Ulrich, 1991). Thus, police cells must provide some privacy and comfort, access to information, and control over lighting and temperature, in order to increase the sense of control of detainees.

²²Kate Piotrowska earned her Master's degree in Interior Design at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HKU) in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 2015. Her thesis can be viewed on her website: www.katepiotrowska.com.



Figure 1. Graphical representation of police cells in the Mijkenbroek police detention centre, Breda, the Netherlands, in 2015. © Kate Piotrowska 2015

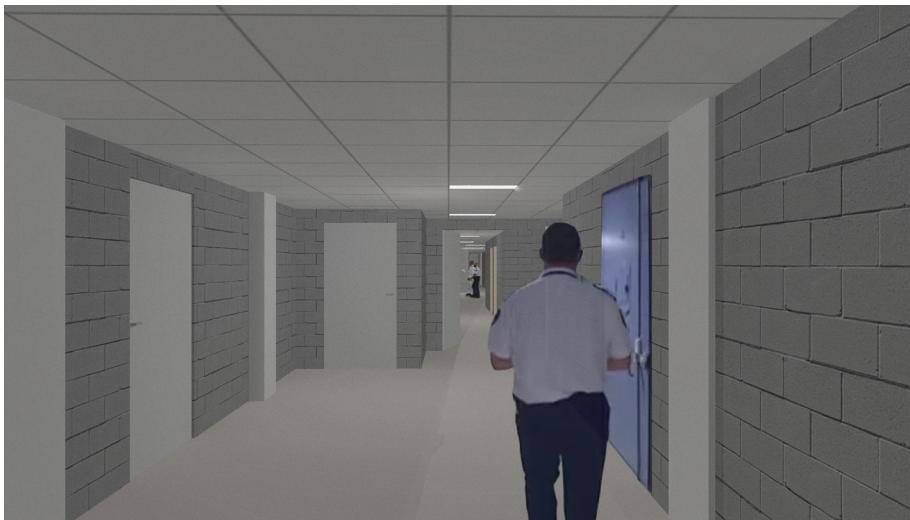


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the interior of the Mijkenbroek police detention centre, Breda, the Netherlands, in 2015. © Kate Piotrowska 2015

Firstly, the redesign comprised more daylight in police cells, for example by placing windows in ceilings. Secondly, a patio with a tree was placed in the central part of the complex, as a reference point, and to provide view to the tree and sky. Thirdly, all dead ends of corridors were removed, for example by creating semi-open walls at the end of hallways to reduce feelings of isolation. Spatial interventions, such as glazed corridor doors, smooth links between inside and outside, and different floor patterns, must make transitions smoother and thereby create a suggestion of more perceived personal control over spaces.

The redesigned cells were painted in white epoxy paint, and cells' furniture were made of soft, sponge-like materials to literally soften the look and feel of it. Warm colours were used in spaces where suspects do not have direct contact with police staff, and wood was used because of its stress-reducing and noise-absorbing properties. All cells were equipped with control panels to control lighting, temperature, toilet, TV, radio, and ventilation. Attention was paid to ceiling height by reducing the ceiling height from 4.3 meters to 3 meters, and daylight by inserting larger windows.



Figure 3. Graphical representation of the future Mijkenbroek police detention centre, Breda, the Netherlands. A patio with a tree, and more daylight.
© Kate Piotrowska 2015

The police staff control room was raised by two steps to suggest hierarchy, and the front was built in a slight angle to suggest a certain distance. Thereby it showed authority and power, without the intention to evoke feelings of stress.

This collaborative project with Kate Pietrowska shows future police detention centres, where the environment contributes to reducing suspects' feelings of stress, anxiety and sleep problems, and to increase work satisfaction in police staff as well. Ultimately, this design may contribute to a more effective police interrogations and police investigation processes.



Figure 4. Graphical representation of the future Mijkenbroek police detention centre, Breda, the Netherlands. On the left: the patio with a tree, on the right: the police control room. © Kate Piotrowska 2015