

# Architecture for Juvenile Rehabilitation: Design of a Detention Center FO Juvenile Offenders in the Town of Maroua, Cameroun

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**Abstract:** This study looks at how thoughtful building design can transform detention centers for young offenders. By exploring how teenagers grow and process stress, it highlights what these youths really need emotionally and socially while in custody. The paper examines how everyday architectural details like natural light, welcoming materials, open layouts, and human-scale spaces can reduce anxiety and encourage healing. Instead of relying on cold, prison-like environments that often make behavior worse, smart spatial design can create a calm atmosphere that supports rehabilitation. Looking at real-world case studies from around the globe, this research uncovers practical design ideas that balance safety with dignity. Ultimately, the goal is to offer architectural solutions that give young people a real chance to rebuild their lives and successfully rejoin society.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Delinquency, Rehabilitation, Penitentiary Architecture, Spatial Configuration, Detention Center.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Youth rehabilitation plays a fundamental role in building a healthy society and securing a better future for younger generations. Yet within many justice systems today, young offenders rarely get access to facilities designed around their actual emotional and developmental needs. Instead, adolescents with complex emotional, neurological, and social challenges are routinely placed in harsh, adult-style institutions. These traditional environments prioritize strict confinement over personal growth, pushing vulnerable youth to the margins rather than helping them rebuild their lives.

To break this cycle, modern architectural design is taking a fresh, evidence-based approach. By drawing on

insights from psychology and neuroscience, we can design spaces that actively calm the mind and address past trauma. Bright, open layouts, natural materials, and human-scaled spaces reduce daily stress and create an atmosphere where real learning and therapy can happen.

The goal of this research is to establish a blueprint for juvenile detention centers that balance safety with human dignity. By exploring adolescent development, reviewing historical penal designs, and analyzing modern international case studies, this study outlines practical spatial choices that help young people heal, learn, and successfully rejoin society.

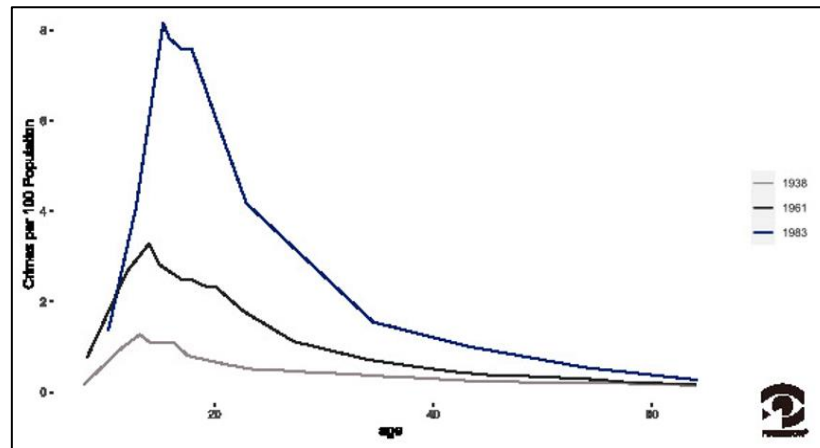


Fig 1 Farrington's Age-Crime Curve

## II. JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Legally, juvenile delinquency encompasses offences (crimes and misdemeanours) committed by minors (under 18) who are capable of discernment. They are processed through a distinct judicial system focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment. In social sciences, it refers to deviant or antisocial acts resulting from learning (Vaz and Baron, 2012), whilst Dr Bovet (1951) describes it as a bio-psycho-social phenomenon.

### ➤ Characteristics of Juvenile Delinquency

Researchers analyse this phenomenon through three foundational pillars: age, the minor's profile, and behaviour.

#### • Age

Delinquency typically peaks during adolescence—a phase marked by identity crises and challenges to authority (Born, 2011). Legal systems adjust accountability based on age to reflect youth immaturity:

| Age            | Legal and Statistical Characteristics                                                                   |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Under 13 years | Presumption of non-discernment. Priority given to educational measures.                                 |
| 13 - 15 years  | Diminished criminal responsibility. Educational sanctions and penalties possible in restricted cases.   |
| 16 - 18 years  | Statistical peak of delinquency. Possibility of prison sentences, although leniency for minors applies. |

Farrington's age-crime curve demonstrates that delinquency generally begins around 12–13 years, peaks between 15–18 years, and declines sharply in adulthood (Pinkerton, 2023).

#### • Profile

Physical profiles often reveal health deficiencies linked to poor environments. Early physical development correlates with higher delinquency scores (Glowacz and Bourguignon, 2015). Furthermore, specific physical traits or clothing styles can trigger societal labelling (Becker, 1963), leading to

increased police scrutiny and the systemic "production" of delinquents.

#### • Behaviour

Young offenders often exhibit introversion, low self-esteem, and repressed anger, which can manifest as defensive, oppositional, or violent outbursts. This lack of self-control and foresight is neurologically linked to the late maturation of the prefrontal cortex.

### ➤ Typology of Juvenile Delinquency

Delinquency is classified by age, profile, and behaviour.

#### • By Age

- ✓ Preadolescence (<13): Minor incivilities (e.g., shoplifting, vandalism) requiring educational and social intervention.
- ✓ Adolescence (13-16): Risk-taking behaviours involving physical altercations; rehabilitation remains the primary goal.
- ✓ Young Adults (16-18): Judged more severely. Offences include drug trafficking and severe assault, though juvenile specifics still apply (Keubou, 2010).

#### • By Profile

- ✓ Physical Delinquency: Assault, threats, and sexual violence, often reflecting personal trauma.
- ✓ Traffic Delinquency: Driving without a licence or under the influence, driven by thrill-seeking and peer pressure.
- ✓ Cyber Delinquency: Hacking, online fraud, cyberbullying, or sharing intimate images without consent.

#### • By Behaviour

- ✓ Property Offences: Theft, vandalism, and arson.
- ✓ Offences Against Persons: Harassment, threats, and intimidation.
- ✓ Drug-Related Offences: Drug use, possession, and trafficking.

➤ *Causes of Delinquency*

Delinquency results from a cumulative interaction of multiple factors:

- *Psychological Factors*

Impulsivity, empathy deficits, ADHD, and difficulty managing frustration. Transgression often serves as a tool for identity affirmation during adolescence.

- *Biological Factors*

Genetic predispositions, neurochemical imbalances, or prenatal toxin exposure can increase the risk of impulsive or aggressive behaviours (Raine, 2013).

- *Socio-economic factors*

Poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and lack of education. Spatial inequalities concentrate these issues in deprived neighbourhoods (Morelle et al., 2018).

- *Family factors*

Family disorganisation, domestic violence, lack of supervision, and exposure to delinquent models strongly correlate with juvenile crime (Wogaing, 2021; UNICEF, 2016).

➤ *Consequences of Delinquency*

The prevalence of delinquency profoundly impacts all involved parties.

- *For the Youth*

Incarceration, social stigma, mental health struggles (depression, PTSD), and increased recidivism risks (Bounoungou, 2012).

- *For the Victim*

Physical, psychological (anxiety, distress), financial, and social repercussions (Boudreau et al., 2009).

- *For Society*

High economic costs for security and justice, a loss of trust in institutions, and a degraded social fabric (Morelle, 2013).

➤ *Strategies for Combating Delinquency*

Prevention operates on three distinct levels:

- *Primary Prevention*

Targets the general youth population to mitigate broad risk factors through quality education, poverty reduction, and secure public spaces (Morelle, 2014).

- *Secondary Prevention*

Focuses on at-risk youth via mentorship, social support, and educational programmes to divert them from crime (Bounoungou, 2012).

- *Tertiary Prevention*

Aims to prevent recidivism in youth who have already offended. Juvenile detention architecture plays a vital role here by providing a structured framework for rehabilitation (Keubou, 2010).

➤ *Juvenile Delinquency vs. Criminality*

Delinquency refers to low-to-medium severity offences (misdemeanours, thefts, drug use). Criminality specifically designates the most severe offences, legally classified as crimes.

➤ *Detention Frameworks*

Detention is governed by frameworks ensuring fundamental rights and rehabilitation.

- *International Standards (UN)*

- ✓ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Deprivation of liberty must be a last resort. Guarantees humane treatment, separation from adults, and access to education (UNICEF, 1989).
- ✓ Beijing Rules: Focuses on prevention, proportionality, and social reintegration.
- ✓ Havana Rules: Details detention conditions (healthcare, education, recreation) to ensure a safe environment.
- ✓ Riyadh Guidelines: Promotes social policies that support healthy youth development to prevent crime.

- *National Standards (Cameroon)*

- ✓ Law No. 2005/007 (27 July 2005) - Criminal Procedure Code: Establishes procedural rules for minors, including specialised juvenile courts and educational measures (SPM, 2005).
- ✓ Decree No. 92/052 (27 March 1992) - Penitentiary Regime: Outlines general prison rules, specifically mandating the separation of minors from adults and addressing their unique needs (SPM, 2005; Morelle et al., 2018).

### III. PENITENTIARY ARCHITECTURE

Penitentiary architecture is a specific architectural typology intrinsically linked to the objectives of sentencing (punishment, rehabilitation, security) and the evolution of penal philosophies. It is characterised by strict constraints regarding security, control, and flow management, whilst increasingly seeking to integrate humanisation and social reintegration (Illi, 2014).

➤ *History*

Prison architecture reflects the philosophy of punishment. Its evolution from medieval dungeons to contemporary facilities mirrors profound transformations in penal thought.

- *Antiquity and the Middle Ages:*

Historically, detention spaces were merely temporary holding areas prior to judgment, execution, or exile. Punishment was primarily corporal (Foucault, 1975). These spaces were unsanitary, dark, and overcrowded, designed for suffering rather than rehabilitation.

- ✓ Ancient Prisons (Greece/Rome): Utilised pre-existing underground structures or deep pits (e.g., Rome's

*Tullianum*), resulting in extreme unsanitary conditions and high pre-trial mortality.

- ✓ **Medieval Prisons:** Primarily castle dungeons and tower basements used for hostages or debtors (Pinatel, 2001). Divided into *oubliettes* (deep pits for permanent confinement) and *tower cells* (cramped spaces with narrow slits for light/air, e.g., the Bastille).

- *Renaissance and Early Modern Period:*

The prison transitioned into an instrument of state social control. Incarceration gradually replaced the physical destruction of the convict.

- ✓ **Renaissance Prisons:** Structured but retained a fortress-like architecture, primarily targeting vagabonds (Debax, 2021).
- ✓ **Forced Labour Houses:** Emerged in the 17th century for galley convicts, featuring large dormitories and workshops designed for collective forced labour (Leclercq, 2014).
- ✓ **Hostelry Prisons:** Late 18th-century precursors integrating minimal hygiene, regular windows, and dedicated sanitary spaces (e.g., the Conciergerie in Paris), though primarily benefiting political prisoners.

- *Revolutionary Era:*

The late 18th century marked an ideological rupture, shifting the focus towards moral reform.

- ✓ **Panopticon Prisons:** Designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791, this model featured a central guard tower surrounded by circular cells. It created a psychological effect where inmates internalised the invisible surveillance (Foucault, 1975).
- ✓ **Philanthropic Reform Prisons:** Prisons began integrating spaces for work, education, and religion to correct and moralise inmates (Morris et al., 1982).

- *19th Century Models:*

A period of intense experimentation dominated by two primary systems:

- ✓ **Pennsylvanian System:** Developed at Cherry Hill (1829), it mandated total, permanent cellular isolation to encourage repentance. It featured radial corridors but often led to severe psychological trauma (Besson, 2024).
- ✓ **Auburn System:** Developed in New York (1816), combining solitary confinement at night with silent, collective labour during the day. It became globally dominant due to higher productivity and lower costs (Waid, 2001).

- *Victorian Era and Belle Époque*

- ✓ **Classic Victorian Prisons:** Massive, intimidating structures designed to symbolise state power and deterrence.
- ✓ **Hygiene/Comfort Innovations:** Gradual introduction of basic amenities (water access, heating, beds) influenced by medical advancements (Demonchy, 2010).

➤ *Characteristics of Penitentiary Architecture*

Prison architecture balances public security with human dignity and rehabilitation.

- **Security and Control:** Maximising visibility and minimising blind spots through physical, technological, and spatial design (Fairweather & McConville, 2000; Besson, 2020).
- **Preservation of Identity:** Enhancing living conditions (natural light, larger cells, social spaces) to preserve dignity and inspire hope (Scheer, 2016).
- **Functionality and Versatility:** Designing adaptable, multi-use spaces (e.g., rooms serving as classrooms and visiting areas) to meet evolving institutional needs.
- **Flow Management:** Creating clear circulation hierarchies to safely manage the movement of inmates, staff, and visitors (Yeghicheyan, 2016).
- **Zoning:** Structuring the facility into distinct functional areas:

- ✓ **Security Zone:** Cells and supervised dayrooms.
- ✓ **Educational/Vocational Zone:** Classrooms and workshops.
- ✓ **Administrative/Operational Zone:** Staff offices and infirmaries.
- ✓ **Visitor Zone:** Parlours and reception areas.
- ✓ **Transitional Zone:** Security sally ports and checkpoints.

- **Privacy:** Providing a minimal private sphere (doors, visual screens in sanitary facilities) essential for psychological well-being despite omnipresent surveillance (Schwartz, 1972; Tschanz, 2020; Johnston, 2018).

➤ *Typology of Penitentiary Establishments*

- *Functional Typology*

- ✓ **Confinement Function:** Focused on neutralisation.

- **Remand Centres:** For individuals awaiting trial or serving short sentences (Monnery, 2025).
- **Central Prisons:** High-security facilities for long sentences or highly dangerous profiles.

- ✓ **Social Reintegration Function:** Focused on Rehabilitation.

- **Detention Centres:** For sentences over two years, featuring a more liberal regime (Légifrance, 2022).
- **Semi-Liberty Centres:** Allow inmates to leave for work, training, or medical treatment (Insee, 2016).
- **Social Children's Homes (MECS):** Private/associative long-term care facilities for minors offering education and training.

- ✓ **Mixed Function:**

- **Juvenile Penitentiary Establishments (EPM):** Dedicated structures for minors (13-18), jointly managed by

penitentiary, educational, and youth protection administrations (Nsimirimana, 2016).

- Closed Educational Centres (CEF): A hybrid of strict confinement and intensive therapeutic/educational projects for serious juvenile offenders (Bailleau et al., 2012).
- Penitentiary Centres: Facilities combining multiple quarters (e.g., a remand centre alongside a detention centre) (Monnery, 2025).

- *Spatial Typology*

- ✓ *By Surveillance Requirements:*

- Radial Model: Wings radiating from a central guard post for maximum visibility.
- Campus Model: Decentralised, autonomous pavilions in a landscaped environment, mimicking a residential setting to foster positive interactions.

- ✓ *By Management Requirements:*

- Comb Model: A central longitudinal spine (services/administration) with perpendicular detention wings, common in Scandinavia.
- Courtyard/Agora Model: Buildings arranged around a central open space serving as a secure recreation and socialisation area.
- Podular Model: Small, autonomous micro-environments (8-64 inmates) containing private cells, common areas, and an integrated guard station to foster human-scale management.

- *Spatial Configuration of a Penitentiary Establishment*

The layout must balance security, education, healthcare, and rehabilitation.

- Detention Spaces: Focus on larger, brighter cells with private sanitation to reduce the institutional feel (OMCT, 2020). Includes individual cells (9–12 m<sup>2</sup>), collective cells (sized proportionally, e.g., 11–14 m<sup>2</sup> for two), and private sanitary fixtures.
- Surveillance Spaces: Guard posts and control rooms offering maximum visibility while ensuring staff safety (Arca, 2021).
- Collective and Activity Spaces: Classrooms, workshops, and gyms designed to encourage constructive participation and socialisation (APT, 2005).
- Care and Socialisation Spaces: Calming, confidential environments for medical, psychological, and social services (Scheer, 2016).
- Administrative Spaces: Secure, highly functional offices physically separated from detention zones (Yeghicheyan, 2016).
- Worship and Spirituality Spaces: Neutral, quiet environments respecting fundamental rights to religious practice (OMCT, 2020).
- Kitchen and Dining Spaces: Clean, safe environments that recognise mealtimes as vital socialisation periods.

#### IV. CRITIQUE OF PUNITIVE AND SURVEILLANCE DRIVEN TYPOLOGIES

When we put young offenders in traditional prison environments, the building itself often works directly against their rehabilitation. The sociologist Erving Goffman (1961) described prisons as "total institutions" places where the normal boundaries between sleeping, learning, and relaxing are completely erased and controlled by a single, rigid authority.

- *The Physical Design of these Carceral Spaces Makes this Dynamic Much Worse in a Few Key Ways:*

- Constant, Visible Surveillance: When youths are continually watched through mirrored glass, CCTV domes, and security grilles, it sends a clear message of profound distrust. According to Jewkes (2018), this environment makes adolescents hyper-vigilant, paranoid, and much more likely to rebel against the system.
- Sensory Deprivation: Dreary grey and beige walls, paired with the harsh flicker of fluorescent lights, strip away normal, healthy sensory experiences. This sheer monotony can leave young people feeling emotionally numb and deeply institutionalised.
- Harsh Acoustics: Traditional prisons are built with hard concrete, masonry, and steel, creating loud, echo-heavy environments. Wener (2012) points out that constant noise directly increases stress hormones (cortisol), ruins sleep, impairs thinking, and makes physical aggression much more likely.
- A Total Lack of Control: With indestructible furniture bolted to the floor and electronically locked doors, youths are stripped of all autonomy. This forced helplessness makes them dependent on the institution, leaving them completely disorientated and ill-equipped for life once they are finally released.

- *The Shift Towards Normalisation and Therapy*

Because these punitive designs fail to rehabilitate, forward-thinking criminologists and architects are pushing for the "Principle of Normalisation" (Pratt, 2008).

Originating in Scandinavian penal systems, this paradigm is based on a straightforward idea: life inside a detention facility should mirror a healthy, positive life on the outside as closely as possible. The punishment is simply the loss of liberty—the daily living conditions themselves should not be an additional punishment. At the same time, breakthroughs in environmental psychology began to back up these ideas. Researchers like Roger Ulrich (1984) and Stephen and Rachel Kaplan (1989) showed just how deeply our physical surroundings affect our minds.

Their work proved that when we design spaces with plenty of natural daylight, indoor plants, safe views of the outdoors, and a comfortable mix of open and private areas, the results are remarkable. These natural, welcoming environments help people recover mentally much faster, noticeably reduce physical signs of stress, and actually

encourage them to get along better and behave more cooperatively with one another.

## V. ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF DETENTION CENTERS

### ➤ *Hasselt Youth Detention Centre (Hasselt, Belgium)*

The Hasselt Youth Detention Centre is specifically designed to feel like a natural part of its surrounding neighbourhood, stripping away the harsh, isolating barriers typically associated with youth facilities.

- **The Layout:** Instead of an intimidating, multi-storey block, the centre is arranged as a series of low-rise pavilions built around calming internal courtyards. The corridors feel open and fluid, using large wooden architectural features and floor-to-ceiling (yet highly secure) glass to provide clear views and seamlessly connect the indoors with the outdoors.
- **The Materials:** The designers actively avoided cold, institutional environments. By prioritising exposed timber, soft acoustic panels to absorb harsh echoes, and an abundance of natural daylight, the interior feels quiet, warm, and inviting.
- **The Impact on Youth:** By eliminating the trapped, claustrophobic feeling of a traditional prison, the building actively helps young people stay calm and manage their emotions. This deeply relaxed atmosphere has a direct, practical benefit: it significantly reduces stress, leading to a noticeable drop in vandalism and violent outbursts.

### ➤ *Storstrøm Prison Youth Unit (Gundslev, Denmark)*

Even though it operates as a high-security facility, Storstrøm has earned international praise for proving that a secure environment can actively support, rather than break down, a person's physical and mental health.

- **The Layout:** Instead of a massive, imposing cell block, the facility is designed to feel like a small, ordinary village. It features clusters of residential buildings with varied rooflines and wide-open, landscaped areas that give the youths breathing room and a sense of normalcy.
- **The Environment:** The living quarters are cleverly designed with angled walls to draw in as much natural daylight as possible. Rather than staring at blank concrete barriers, the youths have clear views out over the surrounding farmland. The architects also prioritised high-quality, textured materials that feel much more like a regular home than a traditional prison cell.
- **The Impact on Youth:** By providing these constant visual connections to nature and carefully controlling the noise levels to prevent harsh, stressful echoes, the building drastically lowers the physical signs of anxiety and stress in the young residents. When youths feel calmer and safer, they are far more willing to engage constructively with educators and staff to work towards their rehabilitation.

### ➤ *Synthesis of Best Architectural Practices*

By bringing together the insights of environmental psychology, the standards set by human rights agreements,

and the proven results of real-world facilities, a clear blueprint emerges for designing youth detention centres. This foundation rests on five essential principles, the five Pillars of Therapeutic Youth Architecture.

- **Keeping Things Human-Sized:** Instead of housing youths in massive, crowded blocks, facilities should be broken down into small, home-like cottages holding no more than eight to ten people. Smaller groups naturally reduce tension and aggressive behaviour, making it much easier for young people to form positive, supportive relationships with their peers and mentors.
- **Connecting with Nature:** We need to bring the outside in. Buildings should be flooded with natural daylight and offer clear views of gardens and landscapes. Furthermore, spending time in outdoor courtyards or learning to grow plants shouldn't just be a bonus—it should be a core part of their daily education and healing process.
- **Creating a Calming Atmosphere:** Traditional prisons are loud, cold, and harsh. By using sound-absorbing materials to kill stressful echoes, and swapping out bare steel and concrete for warm timber, soft fabrics, and pleasant brickwork, we can create an environment that feels soothing rather than punishing.
- **Giving Back Control and Dignity:** Being stripped of all choices is deeply destabilising. Whenever it is safe to do so, we should give these youths a say in their own space—whether that means letting them open a window for fresh air, dim their own lights at night, or have a secure place to keep personal belongings. This small sense of agency is vital for rebuilding their self-worth and emotional stability.
- **Mirroring Normal Daily Life:** In the real world, we do not sleep, eat, and work in the exact same room. Detention centres should mimic a normal community layout by separating the places where youths sleep from where they go to school, learn a trade, or play sports. Simply walking outside across a green campus to get to "school" or "work" helps them build healthy daily habits that will serve them well when they eventually return to society.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The buildings we inhabit do more than just shelter us; they actively shape our mental health, our relationships, and how we grow. For young offenders, whose brains and emotions are still rapidly developing, this impact is profound. A harsh physical environment can easily deepen their trauma and push them further into delinquency. Conversely, a thoughtfully designed space can become a vital tool for healing, learning, and self-control.

Traditional prisons with their rigid containment, endless corridors, and oppressive surveillance only make things worse. They leave young people feeling alienated and hostile, ultimately failing the main goal of the justice system: helping them return to society as healthy individuals.

Instead, we must look to therapeutic design. This means creating spaces that feel more like homes than cages. By bringing in natural light, connecting youths with nature,

controlling stressful noise, and allowing them some basic control over their surroundings, we can change the entire atmosphere. By shifting our focus from static physical barriers (like iron bars) to dynamic, relationship-based security, the architecture can provide safe boundaries whilst actively preserving human dignity.

Ultimately, designing a modern detention centre means leaving the old idea of a "prison" behind. By creating campus-style layouts with small living clusters, robust schools, and community spaces, we can build environments that genuinely prepare young people for the real world. These centres should not just be holding facilities; they must function as therapeutic schools and civic homes safe spaces designed to guide youths through a difficult transition and set them up for a better future.

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