INSPIRE
DETENTION HOUSES IN RESTORATIVE CITIES

RESTORATIVE CITIES



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About this reader

This reader was written within the scope of the INSPIRE project funded by the EU Erasmus+ Programme, implemented by the following consortium: RESCALED (European Office), Reshape (Portugal), Restorative Justice Nederland (Netherlands), WayBack (Norway) and RUBIKON (Czech Republic)

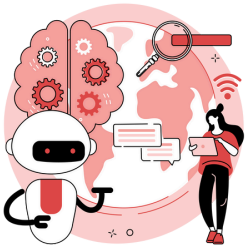
Initially used as a supporting material for the INSPIRE training academy, this reader details the concept of a Restorative City. Its purpose was to define the concept of a Restorative City by identifying essential principles and examining the role of small-scale detention within a Restorative City.

In particular, it is intended to i) define a Restorative City by outlining its core principles, ii) map and compare different Restorative Cities, iii) identify detention houses associated with Restorative Rities, and iv) explore the function of a detention house within a Restorative City context.

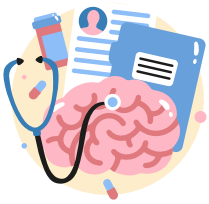
Introduction

For as long as humanity has existed, there have been forms of civilization. In each region, people organised their communities uniquely, shaped by their surroundings—the climate, the availability of water, population size, and other factors. What has allowed humanity to evolve into today's societies is our ability to learn from one another. Each generation builds on the knowledge of the previous one, continuously improving processes, products, and ways of living.

Technological Advancements



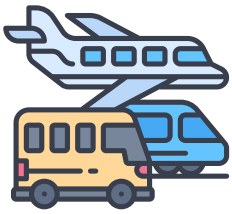
The 19th and 20th centuries brought industrialization, electricity, telecommunications, computers, and the internet. The digital revolution has transformed nearly every aspect of life, with artificial intelligence advancing rapidly in the 21st century.



Healthcare and Medicine

Breakthroughs like antibiotics, vaccines, and advanced surgical techniques have revolutionized healthcare, drastically reducing mortality rates and increasing life expectancy.

Transportation and Infrastructure



From steam engines to electric vehicles and space travel, transportation has evolved dramatically. High-speed trains, commercial air travel, and innovations like electric and self-driving cars have redefined global connectivity.



Science and Space Exploration

Discoveries from quantum physics to genetics have expanded our understanding of nature and the cosmos. Space exploration continues to stretch the boundaries of human knowledge and presence in the universe.

As humanity has grown increasingly cognitively skilled, many aspects of our civilization have evolved. However, the prison system has largely remained the same over the past two centuries.



Prison Wolvenplein (The Netherlands), opened in 1856



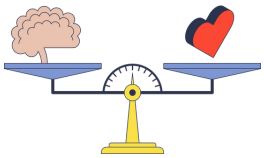
Prison Almelo (The Netherlands), opened in 1995

Some social psychologists suggest that our cognitive development has surpassed our moral growth. While we have the rational ability to develop complex innovations, our emotional development, according to some scientists, remains comparatively primitive. Portuguese neuroscientist Antonio Damasio highlights the essential role of emotions in human survival and decision-making, noting that, while cognition is complex, emotional responses are faster and sometimes less adaptable, often tied to fundamental survival mechanisms.



Antonio Damasio

In 2015, Jesse Meijer et al. conducted research in Dutch prisons titled "Prison Brain? Executive Dysfunction in Prisoners", examining how the stimulus-deprived prison environment impacts cognitive functions, particularly executive skills essential for self-regulation and impulse control. The study found that limited physical activity, cognitive stimulation, and social interaction lead to declines in these skills, contributing to sleep problems, aggression, and reintegration challenges. Meijer also explored links between nighttime activity and aggression, highlighting the potential benefits of increased stimulation and physical activity. He tested incarcerated individuals at the start of their detention and again after three months, investigating interventions such as running programs to mitigate these effects.



The concept of justice in society reflects a balance between cognitive development—expressed in laws and systems—and emotional understanding, reflected in feelings of (in)justice. Civilization has evolved to a system of justice symbolized by the prison; those who break societal rules face exclusion. In a sense, we have concretized our emotional response to injustice in the physical structure of the prison.

What should deprivation of liberty look like in the 21st century?

How does civilization and our immediate surroundings impact this reality?

In recent centuries, there have been attempts to formalize ways of living together that reconsider traditional punitive methods. Restorative Justice Netherlands (RJN), for instance, seeks to develop the concept of a "Restorative City" by identifying nine key principles: circular justice, community involvement, equity, urban design, horizontal relations, sustainability, human rights, dialogue and reframing security. A key element within this vision is the integration of detention houses. Unlike large prisons, these detention houses are designed to keep people part of the community in various ways. They are embedded within communities to promote connections between individuals and their social environments, even while serving a sentence. This reimagining aims to shift society's understanding of justice and accountability. In a Restorative City, justice is not solely the domain of legal authorities but a community responsibility, where everyone contributes to building a safe, sustainable, and inclusive society.

What is a Restorative City?



To begin with, there is **no single, definitive description** of a Restorative City. Even if such a definition existed, the practical expressions of restorative cities would—and should—vary significantly. Justice is not a one-size-fits-all concept; it is shaped by context, location, culture, and the individuals involved. The implementation of a Restorative City is therefore adaptable, **rooted in nine principles** yet flexible enough to address the unique needs of each community.

"When people collectively come together and strategize and plan, working together and acting together, they create a power that they can effectively use in their situation to effect change."

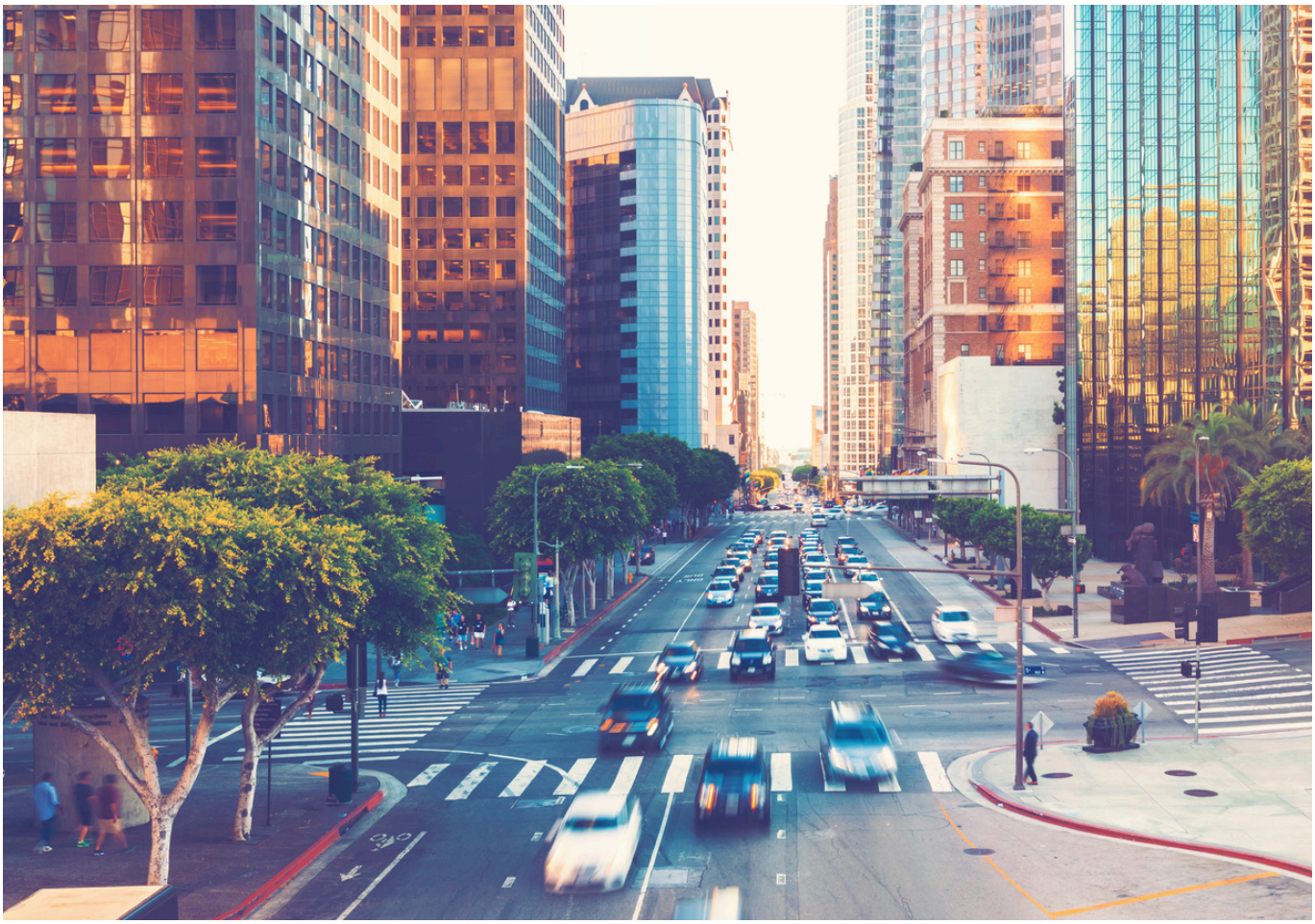
- James Morris Lawson Jr.

In essence, a Restorative City is more of a guiding approach than a rigid model. It embraces diversity in methods, acknowledging that justice is as dynamic as the societies it seeks to support. Justice must always remain responsive to the ever-changing realities of life, ensuring that each community's needs are met in a way that is relevant and sustainable.

How do we define a Restorative City?

People, policies, and situations lie at the heart of the pursuit of justice, which goes beyond the traditional view of victims versus offenders. Instead of focusing solely on punishment, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness of all parties involved in any injustice. Justice is not just about addressing conflicts. We can create more meaningful and long-lasting change by shifting the conversation away from assigning blame and towards collaboration.

A Restorative city embodies this approach. It is a city designed to create justice by ensuring a culture of accountability, empathy, and mutual respect. Through a Restorative City, solutions are sought on a micro, meso and macro level, involving communities and systems.



A Restorative City is defined by nine principles: A Restorative City is rooted in human rights and guided by UN declarations, principles and EU directives. At its core, it minimizes unnecessary government intervention and favors democratic and equitable (horizontal) relationships over hierarchical (vertical) ones, creating a foundation on which equality and trust can flourish. Aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a Restorative City aims to achieve socially just urban and rural development by 2030, incorporating all voices, including those of future generations, into policy-making. The city is seen as an interconnected ecosystem, promoting cohesion and equity across all sectors.

Urban Design in a Restorative City addresses existing inequalities by ensuring equitable access to public spaces and essential services in all neighborhoods. It embraces a “circular justice” approach and sees justice as a shared social value, emphasizing moral development and restoration rather than punishment.

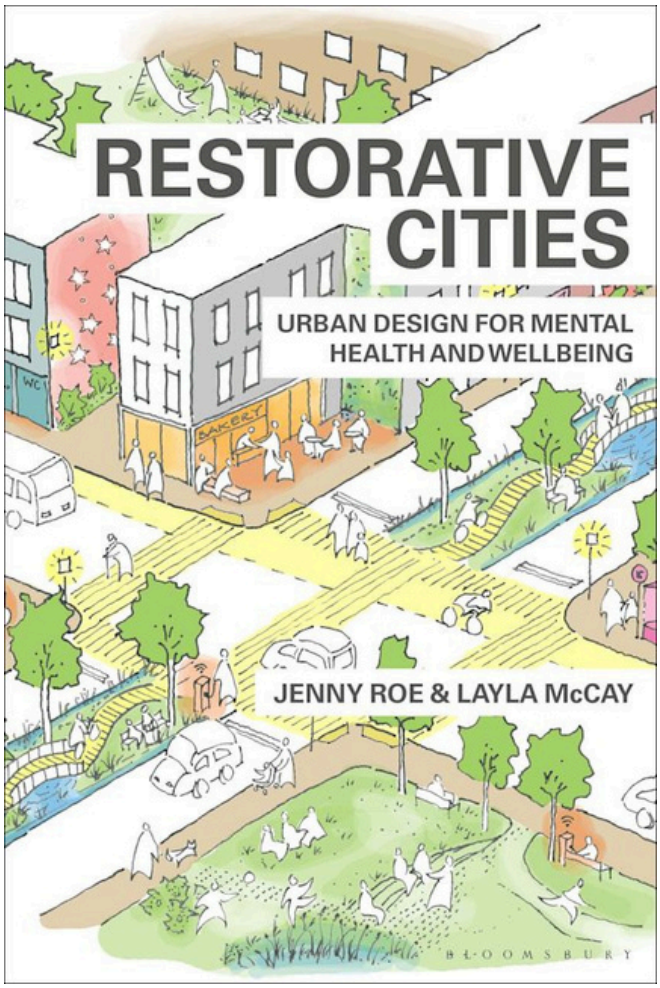
We will explore the nine principles that guide a Restorative City in detail later in this booklet. Together, these principles define a vision for a city that not only addresses injustice but actively strives for a more safe, inclusive and sustainable society!

Other definitions of a Restorative City

European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ)

Efforts have been made to define what constitutes a Restorative cCity, with one significant contribution coming from the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ). Founded in 2000, the EFRJ is an international non-profit organization focused on promoting restorative justice practices across Europe. It acts as a central hub for practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and communities engaged in advancing restorative justice initiatives in various areas such as criminal justice, education, social work, and community development. The EFRJ provides resources, training, and support to foster restorative justice practices in these contexts, contributing to broader efforts of social healing and conflict resolution.

The EFRJ summarizes a Restorative City as; "Everyone needs to recognize themselves as part of the community in which they live in, to participate in the decisions that concern them, and to feel listened to when they are in difficulty and, in everyday life, all human beings need to feel confident, to trust and to be respected. Despite these basic human needs, local communities increasingly experience divisions between groups, violence against the weakest ones, repressive measures against those ones who look different, marginalization, and exclusion. A cultural change is necessary, able to overcome prejudices and stereotypes, to strengthen relationships, to take care of those in distress, and to heal social divisions. There is a widespread need for greater trust, responsibility and solidarity between people. This requires the commitment of everyone, including policy makers, to support a sense of community and strengthen social cohesion (EFRJ, 2023)."



Restorative Cities: Urban Design for Mental Health and Wellbeing

The book "Restorative Cities: Urban Design for Mental Health and Wellbeing" by Jenny Roe and Layla McCay explores how urban design can influence mental health and well-being. The authors present the concept of a "Restorative City," where urban spaces are designed to support mental health, enhance social connections, and create environments that promote well-being for all. They argue that urban planning and design should go beyond functional and aesthetic considerations to integrate mental health as a key factor.

The book discusses various aspects of urban life that affect well-being, including green spaces, access to nature, community spaces, and transportation systems. It emphasizes that cities should be designed with inclusivity, safety, and accessibility in mind to foster healthier, more resilient communities. Roe and McCay provide practical guidelines and examples of restorative design principles that can be implemented in urban planning to improve mental health outcomes and create more humane and supportive living environments.

By applying principles of restorative design, cities can become more livable, fostering environments where people can thrive both physically and mentally. The book also explores the relationship between urban stressors and mental health, offering innovative solutions for urban planners, architects, and policymakers to build healthier urban spaces.

Nine principles of a Restorative City



1 Circular Justice



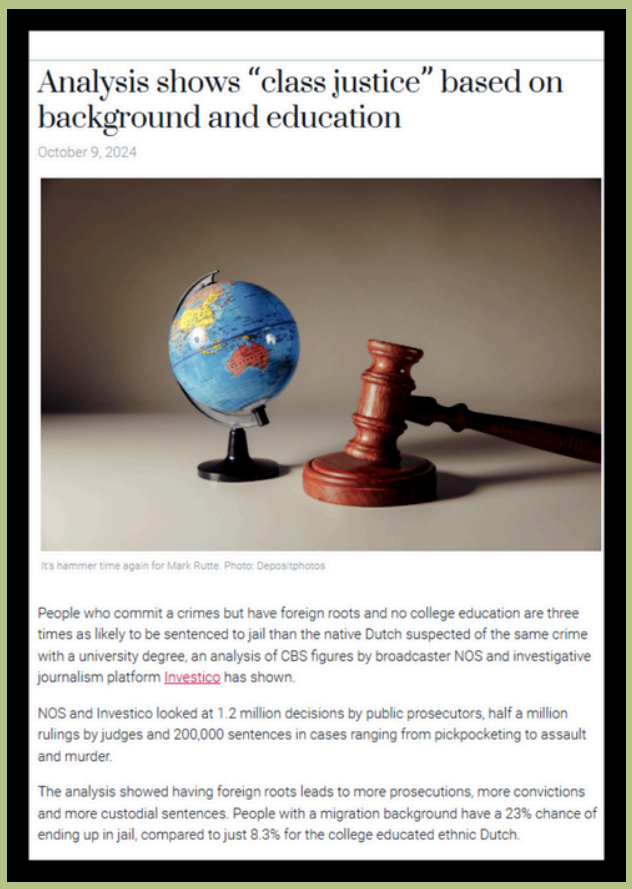
Circular justice relates to the moral development of society by focusing not on individual guilt, but on restoring balance within political, social, and cultural relationships over time.

In this view, justice systems act as spaces that connect past, present, and future, and work to address structural inequalities rather than placing undue responsibility on individuals. In this view, justice systems act as spaces that connect past, present, and future, and work to address structural inequalities rather than placing undue responsibility on individuals.

Most would agree that individuals can exhibit morally blameworthy behavior to some extent. But how does this standard apply to actions taken within and on behalf of society? When can we consider a society as more or less civilized? Individuals have the responsibility and obligation to justify their behavior —shouldn't the systems we've collectively created be held to the same standard? Often, when systems fail, there is a gap in accountability. This is precisely where a Restorative City comes into play, serving as a framework that maintains balance within the network of political, social, and cultural relationships. It seeks to hold these systems accountable, ensuring justice by considering the past, present, and future.

Just as we envision a circular economy, we can also redesign our legal system towards circular justice, where judgments account for historical and future impacts rather than merely addressing immediate conflicts. While this shift cannot happen overnight, it begins with choosing a new future—a horizon aimed at true systemic equity.

In a Restorative City, circularity is central. Here, justice serves as a restorative force, rebalancing relationships within society itself and ensuring that the system, not just individuals, is held accountable when harm occured, occurs or could occur. This approach focuses on cultivating a moral, cohesive community by keeping political, social, and cultural dynamics in check, always mindful of past, present, and future.



Analysis shows "class justice" based on background education

October 9, 2024

It's hammer time again for Mark Rutte. Photo: Depositphotos

People who commit a crimes but have foreign roots and no college education are three times as likely to be sentenced to jail than the native Dutch suspected of the same crime with a university degree, an analysis of CBS figures by broadcaster NOS and investigative journalism platform Investico has shown.

NOS and Investico looked at 1.2 million decisions by public prosecutors, half a million rulings by judges and 200,000 sentences in cases ranging from pickpocketing to assault and murder.

The analysis showed having foreign roots leads to more prosecutions, more convictions and more custodial sentences. People with a migration background have a 23% chance of ending up in jail, compared to just 8.3% for the college educated ethnic Dutch.

Analysis shows "class justice" based on background education

Analysis shows "class justice" based on background education

The article on class-based disparities in the Dutch justice system provides a clear example of how circular justice can expose and address the structural issues within societal systems. It illustrates how factors like education and socio-economic background influence legal outcomes, often leading to harsher punishments for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This systemic inequality highlights the need for a broader view of justice that goes beyond individual guilt, and instead focuses on restoring balance within the entire system.

Circular justice, as a guiding principle in a Restorative City, moves away from focusing solely on individual wrongdoing and instead seeks to restore balance within the broader social, political, and cultural systems. It challenges the status quo by asking not only how individuals can be held accountable, but how the systems themselves can be reformed to address historical and ongoing injustices. The disparities outlined in the article demonstrate the failure of the justice system to account for the full context of a person's circumstances, and circular justice urges a more holistic approach.

2 Community Involvement



For neighborhoods—and by extension, cities and society—to become and remain pleasant, safe, and engaged communities, it starts with residents' ability to connect with and take ownership of their physical and social environment. When residents feel empowered to influence what happens around them, they develop a sense of shared responsibility and stewardship over their community.

Community involvement in the legal process further enables residents to shape their neighborhoods. Through participatory governance, individuals actively contribute to decision-making, influencing policies and local initiatives. Investments in education and skills training ensure that all residents can engage meaningfully.

This inclusive approach fosters individual and collective responsibility, creating a shared commitment to community well-being. With every member acting as a co-owner of their environment, the legal process becomes more inclusive and effective, proactively addressing challenges and reflecting the community's diverse needs.



Million Dollar Blocks

Million Dollar Blocks

Community involvement is intricately linked to the Million Dollar Blocks project because the initiative reveals how mass incarceration affects specific neighborhoods, often those that are already marginalized and under-resourced. By highlighting the immense financial resources being used to incarcerate residents from these neighborhoods, the project implicitly calls for greater community involvement and investment in alternative approaches that could benefit these areas more sustainably. By mapping the immense costs of incarceration in these neighborhoods, the project raises the question of how these funds could be better spent. Community involvement is critical in this context, as local residents should have a voice in determining where these resources should go—whether for education, housing, mental health services, or job training—so that they can address the root causes of crime and improve their neighborhoods in meaningful ways.

3 Horizontal Relations



Horizontal relations refer to a system of governance and social interactions where power and decision-making are evenly distributed among participants, rather than concentrated in a few individuals or hierarchical structures

Democracy, a key aspect of horizontal relations, emphasizes active participation, inclusion, and shared responsibility. It ensures that all individuals or groups affected by decisions have a voice, whether through voting, open dialogue, or other participatory methods. This approach seeks to amplify the voices of the many, rather than privileging the few.

Unlike vertical relationships, which are defined by clear hierarchies and authority, horizontal relationships are based on equality, enabling individuals or entities to interact on equal terms. The idea is that when horizontal relations are in place, it leads to more inclusive, fair, and transparent processes. This reduces the chances of coercion or the need for top-down enforcement, as the community or group works collectively toward common goals.



De tafelberg

De Tafelberg

Amsterdam no longer has a prison, as the Bijlmerbajes has closed and its capacity relocated to Zaanstad. It's intriguing to consider whether there could be space in Zuidoost for a small-scale detention house, perhaps within a community similar to De Tafelberg. De Tafelberg, situated on the site of a former youth prison and a closed youth care institution, has been transformed into a vibrant living community. It provides housing for 290 young adults, including 60 with backgrounds in youth care.

This initiative, led by Levvel (a youth care organization) in partnership with the housing association De Alliantie and other collaborators, embodies principles of inclusion and shared responsibility. Residents participate equally in shaping the community, with personal connections often replacing professional interventions. Social entrepreneurs embedded in the ecosystem provide opportunities for internships, work experience, and workshops, while facilities are shared with neighborhood residents to promote integration and collective well-being.

The Tafelberg's community-oriented and participatory model reflects horizontal relations by fostering equality, collaboration, and mutual support. This approach could inspire the creation of a small-scale detention house, where incarcerated individuals live alongside other citizens, with a balanced mix of groups to ensure harmony and community cohesion.

4 Dialogue



A Restorative City is driven by dialogue. Here, dialogue goes beyond mere communication; it serves as a core process that builds understanding, fosters empathy, and promotes collaboration across all segments of society.

A Restorative City concept dialogue driven. Direct communication is at the heart of a Restorative City, carefully adapted to the context, culture, needs, and resources. Everyone is encouraged and supported to take part in the dialogue, ensuring inclusivity and shared involvement. At the core of this dialogue is a sense of ownership, linking agency with responsibility, with support and facilitation provided whenever needed.

5 Human Rights



A Restorative City is grounded in human rights, as outlined in UN declarations and principles, as well as EU rules and guidelines, ensuring respect for individual autonomy and dignity within the city's framework.

Underlying this is the notion of refraining from unnecessary and coercive government intervention in people's personal lives and, if it does, based on democratic and horizontal relationships.

In alignment with these principles, the UN Human Rights Council, in its Resolution 57/9 adopted on October 9, 2024, encourages alternatives to traditional incarceration, such as small-scale detention. The resolution emphasizes the importance of prioritizing social reintegration for individuals released from detention or subjected to non-custodial measures. It calls on States to introduce alternatives to incarceration, such as community-based programs, conditional release, home leave, and other non-custodial measures, recognizing the importance of supporting individuals in reintegrating into society in a humane and dignified manner.

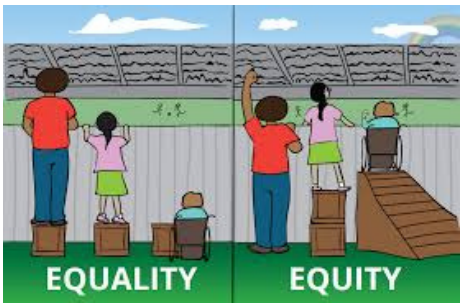
The resolution, supported by 120 NGOs from 49 countries, highlights a collective global commitment to human rights and dignity, ensuring that individuals are treated with respect, even after being convicted of a criminal offence. This approach reflects the values of a Restorative City, where the focus is on rehabilitation, community integration and reducing reliance on traditional punitive measures. In this context, a Restorative City becomes a place where the dignity of individuals is preserved, and where inclusive, community-centered alternatives are favored over coercive systems.

Image source



📄 Read the full text of Resolution 57/9 here

6 Equity



Equity tool

In a just society, equity goes beyond mere equality; it aims to create or restore equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of origin, background, race, gender, identity, or socioeconomic status.

This vision of justice involves a comprehensive approach of inclusive thought and action, where policies and practices actively address structural inequities and focus on systemic healing where necessary. It acknowledges that treating cases alike may not always result in fairness, as individuals may face different barriers and challenges due to their unique circumstances.

In pursuing equity, barriers to inclusion and full participation are identified and dismantled, promoting an environment where all community members can thrive. This approach requires proactive efforts to tackle systemic inequalities such as discrimination, prejudice, and institutionalized biases, working to create a society where justice is genuinely accessible to all.

"While equality can be converted into a mathematical measure in which equal parts are identical in size or number, equity is a more flexible measure allowing for equivalency while not demanding sameness."

- Social equity



Are income-related fines more just than regular fines?

Are income-related fines more just than regular fines?

An example of equity in practice can be seen in the concept of income-related fines. As discussed by Elena Kantorowicz-Reznichenko, Professor of Quantitative Empirical Legal Studies at Erasmus School of Law, this approach aims to make the fine system fairer by linking fines to a person's income, ensuring that the penalty is proportional to their financial capacity. Countries like Finland have adopted this system for over 100 years, where fines can reach tens of thousands of euros for high-income individuals committing minor offenses, such as speeding.

The introduction of income-related fines ensures that justice is more equitable by preventing wealthier individuals from simply buying their way out of consequences while reducing the likelihood of poor people being incarcerated for failing to pay fines. This system directly aligns with the principle of equity, as it actively addresses socio-economic disparities and creates a more just approach to penalizing offenses.

7 Reframing Security



By creating an environment where safety is based on trust and collaboration, this model seeks to create safer spaces that prioritize community participation and empowerment.

Reframing security through a positive, relational lens calls for a fundamental shift from traditional, risk-based models centered on control and punishment. This reimagined approach to security instead seeks to address the deeper, structural issues that can lead to conflict, emphasizing prevention, inclusion, and the resilience of the community.

Central to this approach is the commitment to leverage local skills and talents to find solutions that support both individual and communal well-being. This involves inviting community members to participate directly in problem-solving, creating proactive rather than reactive security measures. By drawing on community strengths and resources, this relational model aims to transform security from surveillance and enforcement into a cooperative endeavor rooted in trust and mutual respect.

In a detention house, the principle of relational security is especially relevant. Working in these environments presents complex challenges, as staff navigate a wide range of cognitive, psychological, and social needs among those incarcerated. Promoting a safe and therapeutic environment requires staff to manage both externalizing and internalizing issues, underscoring the importance of a sound security framework that focuses on building alliances between staff and people in detention.

In 2023, RESCALED developed **relational security guidelines** for staff in small-scale detention facilities. These guidelines are the first step toward a standardized approach that emphasizes relational security, helping create safer, more supportive environments in modern detention settings. For additional details on relational security, please refer to the European Guidelines on Relational Security.


CASE STUDY

DRUG DECRIMINALISATION IN PORTUGAL: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

KEY POINTS

- Drug-related deaths fell after the reform of Portugal's drug policy, and have remained below the EU average since 2001
- The proportion of the prison population sentenced for drug offences has fallen from over 40% to 15%
- Rates of drug use have remained consistently below the EU average
- Portugal has gone from accounting for over 50% of yearly HIV diagnoses linked to injecting drug use in the EU to 1.7%

BACKGROUND

In 2001, Portugal decriminalised the personal possession of all drugs as part of a wider re-orientation of policy towards a health-led approach. Possessing drugs for personal use is instead treated as an administrative offence, meaning it is no longer punishable by imprisonment and does not result in a criminal record and associated stigma.[1] Drugs are, however, still confiscated and possession may result in administrative penalties such as fines or community service.

Whether such a penalty is applied is decided by district-level panels made up of legal, health and social work professionals, known as 'Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction'. Where an individual is referred to a Commission for the first time and their drug use is assessed as non-problematic (low risk), the law requires their case to be 'suspended', meaning no further action is taken. Fines can be issued for subsequent referrals. Where some problematic trends are identified (moderate risk), brief interventions are proposed — including counselling — but these are non-mandatory. In 'high risk' cases, where more serious problematic behaviours and dependence are identified, individuals may receive non-mandatory referrals to specialised treatment services.[2]

In the vast majority of instances, problematic drug use

Drug decriminalisation in Portugal: setting the record straight

Drug decriminalisation in Portugal: setting the record straight

A strong example of reframing security through a positive, relational lens can be seen in Portugal's approach to drug decriminalization, as discussed in this article by Transform Drug Policy Foundation. Rather than focusing on punitive measures, Portugal has adopted a new strategy that treats drug use as a public health issue, not a criminal one. By decriminalizing drug possession and offering treatment and social services instead of punishment, Portugal has shifted away from traditional, risk-based models that rely on control and incarceration.

This model directly aligns with the principle of reframing security in a Restorative City, as it emphasizes prevention, inclusion, and community resilience. It moves beyond the cycle of punishment and surveillance, aiming to address the root causes of substance misuse and promote community well-being. By focusing on providing support and empowering individuals rather than stigmatizing or criminalizing them, Portugal's approach creates safer, more inclusive environments that build trust and collaboration between individuals, communities, and institutions. In this way, security is reimagined as a cooperative effort that engages the community in proactive problem-solving, fostering long-term social and health benefits.

8 Sustainability



Within a Restorative City, policies align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on fostering sustainable urban and rural development and achieving a socially just society by 2030.

Creating sustainable policies and a socially just society requires consideration of the perspectives of all involved parties -- including those of future generations. This involves supporting local collaborations and organizations that function in socially just and ecologically sustainable ways for the long term, ensuring the city has the smallest possible ecological footprint.



Torres Nova prison - Vertical garden

Nature-based detention houses

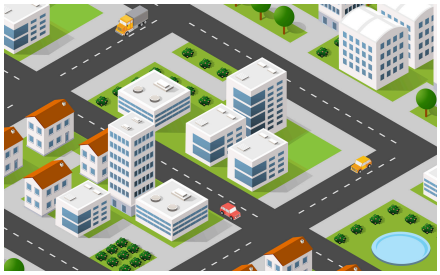
Nature-based detention houses illustrate how Restorative Cities can integrate sustainability into their institutions. Detention houses align with Restorative City principles by embedding ecological, social, and economic sustainability. They replace large, resource-intensive prisons with small-scale, community-integrated facilities that protect and restore local ecosystems.

The ecological benefits of detention houses come from both their design and operation. Architecturally, they can feature green facades, extensive greenspaces, and energy-efficient construction, which help reduce air and surface temperatures, enhance biodiversity, and create more livable environments. Concepts like Stefano Boeri's "Vertical Forests" inspire how vegetation can be integrated into infrastructure, benefiting not only the environment but also the well-being of incarcerated individuals and staff by reducing stress, violence, and self-harm.

Operationally, detention houses incorporate sustainable practices such as waste recycling, local food production in vegetable gardens, and plant-based diets. These align with the "doughnut model," balancing ecological and social boundaries for long-term sustainability. By reducing their ecological footprint and promoting positive impacts on surrounding ecosystems, detention houses demonstrate that even criminal justice systems can reflect restorative and sustainable values.

For more insights, read Wiep Fokker's full blog post on nature-based detention houses on the Penal Reform International website: Nature-Based Detention Houses.

9 Urban Design



Urban design involves how a government systematically organizes living spaces through explicit rules, balancing the interests of individuals and the community.

Urban design is as much about human interactions as it is about physical structures, shaping who connects with whom, which facilities are available in each neighborhood, and who has access to public spaces. Urban design extends far beyond mapping buildings; it profoundly impacts social mobility, community health, education, inclusivity, and social geography. A Restorative City confronts these inequalities, revealing and addressing injustices embedded in urban planning to build a more just society.



Alle foto's uit dit artikel zijn gemaakt in een van de groenste en twee van de minst groene buurten van Den Haag.
Beeld: Thijs de Lange

KLIMAAT Analyse

HITTEPOLITIEK: ARME WIJK, WARME WIJK

De ene stadswijk krijgt het in de hittegolf veel zwaarder te verduren dan de andere. Hoe meer bomen, hoe koeler. Hoe meer beton, hoe heter. Die verdeling blijkt niet willekeurig: Veruit de meeste Haagse wijken met weinig groen bleken óók minder welgesteld.

Hittepolitiek: arme wijk, warme wijk

Heat politics: poor neighbourhood, hot neighbourhood

An insightful example of how urban design can directly influence equity and inclusivity is explored in this article on the effects of heat in poor neighborhoods in the Netherlands. The article highlights how low-income areas are disproportionately affected by heatwaves, a direct consequence of poor urban planning that fails to account for the social and environmental needs of these communities. The article discusses how the physical layout and design of cities—such as the prevalence of heat-retaining surfaces and limited green spaces—can create unhealthy, unsafe conditions, particularly for marginalized populations.

This example illustrates the core principle of urban design in a Restorative City, where the built environment is not just about physical infrastructure but also about fostering healthy, inclusive, and equitable communities. Urban planning has a profound impact on who has access to resources, public spaces, and opportunities for social interaction. By addressing these inequities, cities can transform into restorative spaces that prioritize the well-being of all residents. In a Restorative City, urban design actively seeks to correct these imbalances, ensuring that neighborhoods are designed with the health and safety of all their inhabitants in mind, particularly those who have historically been marginalized or neglected.

Detention houses within a Restorative City

An essential aspect of a Restorative City is the implementation of detention houses. Maintaining large-scale prisons within a Restorative City implies maintaining a system in which some individuals remain excluded from society. Instead, detention houses offer the opportunity to focus on recovery and promote individuals' integration into society. This approach ensures that detention does not mean permanent separation but rather a temporary phase in which interaction and connection with the community are maintained.



What is a detention house?

Detention houses are characterised by three principles: small-scale, differentiation and community-integration. When many detention houses are located in the community, and differ from each other they can provide the right context for each individual. These three principles are connected and reinforce each other.

Small-Scale

At RESCALED, size is a means to achieve closeness and belonging, rather than an end in itself. Detention houses, with a capacity of 8 to 30 people, emphasize community and meaningful relationships. Hence, it is not about numbers. **It is about people.**



In these small-scale facilities, the environment is less bureaucratic and anonymous than in large prison institutions, allowing for a more **personal approach** and fostering **dynamic security.** The approachable nature of staff in these settings enhances feelings of safety and helps prevent or quickly resolve incidents. Except in rare high-risk cases, incarcerated individuals live communally, share responsibilities, and learn to navigate the complexities of group living.

The small-scale nature of detention houses also strengthens ties with the community as they are more likely to be located in neighbourhoods accessible to staff, NGOs, and visitors. Small-scale facilities tend to be **more visitor-friendly than large prison institutions,** which is particularly relevant when the visitors are children.

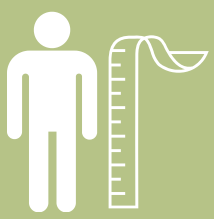


Differentiation

Because detention houses are small and there are many of them, they offer the flexibility to provide housing that best suits each individual's needs, enabling them to fulfil their potential. This approach, known as differentiation, involves placing people in contexts **tailored to their specific needs and conditions.**

High-security measures, typical of large prison institutions, are necessary for only few individuals and often make reintegration more challenging. In contrast, most incarcerated individuals benefit from lower security settings, which are not only more cost-effective to build and operate but also better suited to preparing them for reintegration. In a detention house, security may consist of (a combination of) **relational security, static security and procedural security measures.**

Instead of relying on traditional 'low-medium-high security' classifications, security is adjusted based on a scale from many restrictive measures in freedom of movement to very few measures and an individual's gradual regain of liberty.



Differentiated facilities, offering comprehensive and personalised support services, activities, and programs, ensure that incarceration aligns with each person's needs, ultimately making the reintegration process smoother and more beneficial for both the individual and society.

Detention houses are not isolated from society. They are integrated within the community, located at an accessible distance from the incarcerated persons' social network and the community where they will be living after release.



Community-Integration

This enables a dynamic interaction with local stakeholders: teachers, psychologists, social workers, health care professionals and sports coaches, as well as local governments and volunteers from the community. Thus, people in detention houses make use of the same service providers as everyone else in the neighbourhood, and in low-security settings, they can go out to meet these providers.

This **continuity helps build relationships** that will support their reintegration after release.

These initiatives allow incarcerated people to engage in meaningful activities that benefit society and themselves, helping to restore the harm caused by their offences both symbolically and financially. Even in high-security detention houses, added value can be created by sharing spaces with local NGOs or community groups.

Why not let the local art school gather in the detention house visiting room when it is not in use?

By fostering **thorough preparation and ongoing dialogue with the neighbourhood,** community-integrated detention houses contribute to a general sense of safety, fairness, and justice.



The Healthy Ecosystem of a Detention House

The ecosystem of a detention house is shaped by the individuals connected to it—the incarcerated people, staff members, visitors, and local service providers—as well as their communities and society as a whole. These groups form a web of relationships that together define the ecosystem in and around the detention house. Various factors such as architectural design, work and education opportunities, psychosocial support, staff well-being, and the use of technology can either facilitate or impede these relationships.

This holistic approach, viewing all dimensions of a detention house as an interconnected ecosystem, is known as the ecosystem perspective.

In a healthy ecosystem, each element reinforces the others to create an effective, balanced system. Conversely, disruptions can destabilize it.

The ecosystem of a detention house is not limited to the physical boundaries of the detention house, nor is it limited to the boundaries of the criminal justice system. On the contrary, it exists at the junction of other ecosystems: that of the criminal justice system, the (mental) health care system, the education system, the employment system etc.



Considering all these dimensions in and around a detention house in a holistic way is what we call the ecosystem perspective on detention houses.

Detention houses within a Restorative City

Recovery and integration



Small detention facilities are not isolated from the community, people in detention use services available in the community and add value to the neighborhood and/or city. This invests in shared responsibility to keep society safe and inclusive. In detention houses, the recovery-oriented nature of detention and aftercare is central. The concept of a recovery-oriented city can support this: A recovery-oriented city commits to solution-oriented, talent-oriented and change-oriented work.



Addressing root causes of behaviour

In addition, detention houses make it possible to look deeper into the root causes of criminal behaviour, addressing the underlying issues. So the implementation of detention houses in a Restorative City will create an environment that promotes recovery and integration. A Restorative City dares to invest in understanding its citizens and strive for a society in which detention does not only punish but also restores.

Investing in its citizens



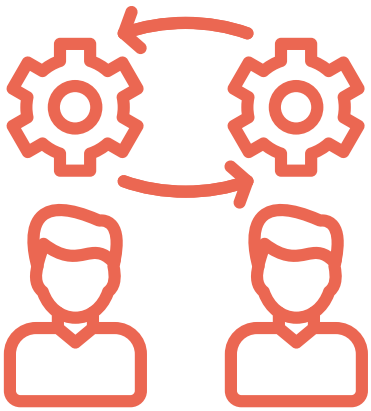
To successfully implement detention houses in a Restorative City, it is critical that the community be willing to look at the causes of criminal behavior and take responsibility for creating an environment that promotes recovery and integration. A Restorative City dares to invest in understanding its citizens and to strive for a society in which incarceration not only punishes but also restores.

Four Paradigms on Justice

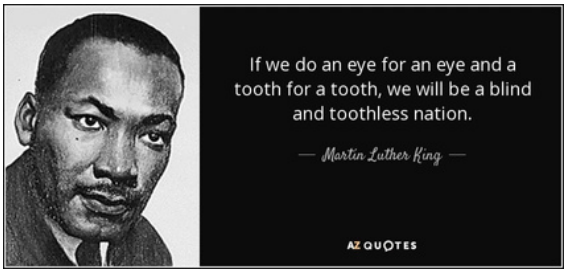
Before discussing the concept of a Restorative City, it is important to understand various theories of justice. These theories function as paradigms, each offering insights into how societies channel emotions into relatively fixed systems. While some paradigms are more widely applied than others, each is utilized to some degree across different societies.

Theories of justice provide frameworks for understanding what constitutes a fair and just society and the means to achieve it. Each theory offers a unique perspective on justice, highlighting different goals and approaches, yet they often intersect and inform one another. In this reader, we distinguish four primary paradigms: **Retributive Justice, Criminal Justice, Restorative Justice, and Transformative Justice**. Each paradigm guides how justice is perceived, pursued, and delivered, embodying different values and objectives —from punishment and legal order to healing and social transformation.

It's worth noting that these paradigms are not rigid or absolute. For instance, concepts like **distributive justice** and **ecological justice** have been integrated within these four broader paradigms, reflecting the complexity of categorizing justice issues. Recognizing the fluid and interconnected nature of justice paradigms enables a more nuanced and adaptable approach to addressing justice in complex, real-world contexts.



1 Retributive Justice - Rooted in Punishment



Retributive justice is a theory of justice focused on punishment as a response to people who show criminal behavior according to society's laws. This theory is built on the belief that those who break the law deserve to suffer a consequence that mirrors the harm they inflicted. Retributive justice seeks to establish moral balance by ensuring that wrongdoing is met with a corresponding punishment, ideally as a deterrent against future crimes. The metaphor which suits the paradigm of retributive justice is "an eye for an eye". This refers to the principle of retributive justice, where the punishment for wrongdoing is proportional to the harm caused. It originates from ancient legal codes, such as the Old Testament, and conveys the idea that justice should be served by giving back equal retribution to the offender.

Criticism on this theory is that it does not address the needs of victims, communities, or the rehabilitation of people, nor does it take into account the inequalities in society that produced crime or unequal distribution of welfare.

Four key elements of the retributive justice paradigm:

Moral accountability: Retributive justice emphasizes the moral responsibility of the individual. It holds individuals accountable for their actions and asserts that they should be punished because they made a conscious choice to commit the crime.

Focus on the past act: Retributive justice looks backward at the offense that was committed, rather than forward toward rehabilitation or societal benefits. The punishment is seen as a response to a specific wrongdoing.

Punishment as a moral obligation: From the retributive perspective, society has a moral duty to punish wrongdoers to uphold justice and maintain social order. Punishment is not seen as a means to deter future crimes or rehabilitate the offender (as in restorative justice), but as an end in itself.

Fairness and equality: Retributive justice aims to treat individuals equally under the law. The idea is that everyone should be subject to the same legal standards, and similar crimes should result in similar punishments.



This concept is often contrasted with other forms of justice, such as restorative justice, which focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime. While retributive justice seeks to "balance the scales" by giving people the punishment they deserve, it is sometimes criticized for being too focused on punishment and not addressing the root causes of crime or promoting healing for victims and society.

2 Criminal Justice - Rooted in Law



Criminal justice is a system-based approach rooted in legal frameworks and governed by laws, regulations, and legal processes. This theory of justice is structured around the idea that offenses violate the laws of society, not just individual victims. The criminal justice system involves law enforcement, courts, and prisons, each tasked with ensuring justice through lawful procedures. Criminal justice relies on laws to determine guilt, impose penalties, and protect civil rights, aiming to uphold social order and public safety. The criminal justice system is the theory of justice that is common in most societies.

While criminal justice is the most widely applied model in modern societies, it faces several criticisms. Fair processes do not always guarantee fair outcomes, and bureaucratic procedures can become rigid or inefficient. The system is often critiqued for simplifying human behavior into moral categories that fit within a legal framework, yet this approach frequently overlooks racial and social inequalities, the high rates of recidivism in countries with large prison populations, and unequal access to competent legal representation. Thus, despite its role in balancing social order with individual rights, the criminal justice system may fall short in addressing the complexities of society and ensuring justice for all.

"An unjust law is not law at all."
- Saint Augustine

Six key elements of the criminal justice paradigm are;

Deterrence: The system aims to prevent individuals from committing crimes through the threat of punishment (general deterrence) and by preventing convicted people from reoffending.

Punishment: Criminal justice provides a mechanism for punishing those who break the law. Punishments can range from fines and community service to imprisonment and, in some countries, the death penalty.

Rehabilitation: A key objective is to rehabilitate people so that they can return to society as law-abiding citizens. This may involve education, therapy, and skill development.

Retribution: This aspect focuses on the idea that offenders deserve to be punished in proportion to the severity of their crimes. It is rooted in the concept of moral accountability.

Restoration: In rare cases, the system seeks to restore harm done to victims and communities through practices like restorative justice, where people are encouraged to take responsibility and make amends.

Protection: Criminal justice protects society by removing 'dangerous' individuals from the community and by preventing future crimes through law enforcement and legal processes.

3 Restorative Justice - Rooted in Mediation



Restorative justice is an alternative approach that emphasizes repairing harm rather than assigning blame or imposing punishment. It focuses on reconciliation between the person who committed the crime, the victim/survivor, and the community. Rooted in restoration, this model of justice seeks to address the needs of victims/survivors, hold people accountable in a constructive way, and reintegrate them into society. Restorative justice practices often involve mediation, dialogue, and community service, aiming to build empathy, mutual understanding, and healing. The goal is to mend the social fabric disrupted by crime and restore relationships, providing a path forward for all people involved.

This theory can be symbolized by the Japanese art of Kintsugi, where broken pottery is repaired with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Rather than hiding the cracks, Kintsugi highlights them, making the fractures an integral part of the piece's history and aesthetic. This art form symbolizes resilience, healing, and the acceptance of imperfections, conveying the idea that something broken can become even more beautiful and valuable through thoughtful repair.

Critics of the restorative justice theory argue that it may prioritize the needs of people who committed the crime over the punishment or needs of victims/survivors and it may be seen as too lenient, especially in cases of serious crime, and difficult to implement on a large scale.

Five key elements of Restorative Justice;

Repairing harm: The primary focus is on addressing the harm caused to the victim and, where possible, restoring what has been lost or damaged.

Involvement of stakeholders: Restorative justice actively involves those affected by the crime (victims, offenders, and the community) in finding solutions.

Dialogue: It encourages open dialogue, where victims can express their needs and offenders can take responsibility for their actions.

Accountability: People who committed the crime are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and make amends to the victim and the community.

Community healing: The approach fosters community involvement in resolving conflicts and helping to reintegrate offenders into society, reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

- Fyodor Dostoevsky



4 Transformative Justice - Rooted in Change

Transformative justice goes beyond addressing individual acts of harm, aiming instead to change the underlying social conditions that contribute to crime. Rooted in the principle of systemic change, transformative justice examines factors like poverty, discrimination, and inequality that may lead to criminal behavior. It seeks to transform both individuals and societal structures, addressing root causes to prevent future harm. Transformative justice approaches often prioritize community-building, education, and empowerment, fostering environments where people can collectively address and heal from injustices. This theory advocates for deep, lasting changes that support a fairer and more just society.

Five key elements of transformative justice;

Addressing root causes: Transformative justice aims to identify and dismantle the systemic causes of harm, such as racism, sexism, economic inequality, and other forms of oppression. It seeks to challenge power dynamics and social structures that perpetuate harm.

Community-centered: Rather than relying on the formal legal or criminal justice systems, transformative justice focuses on community-based solutions. It encourages communities to take responsibility for addressing harm in ways that prioritize healing, accountability, and systemic change.

Focus on healing and accountability: Like restorative justice, transformative justice emphasizes healing for both the person who was harmed and the person who caused harm. However, it goes further by holding individuals accountable within the broader context of societal inequalities and injustice.

Prevention of future harm: Transformative justice seeks to prevent future harm by transforming the conditions that allow harm to occur in the first place. This could mean changing community norms, redistributing resources, or promoting equity and justice on a larger scale.

Non-punitive approach: Transformative justice rejects punitive measures like imprisonment or retribution. Instead, it advocates for processes that center on understanding, reparations, and rebuilding relationships while addressing systemic injustices.



Restorative Justice Practices in a city vs. a Restorative City

While the EFRJ definition can be applied to transformative justice theory, it is often applied as a tool for the restorative justice paradigm. It is important to understand that in practice there is a difference between restorative justice practices in a city and the Restorative City. Restorative justice practices in a city are tools to address individual conflicts and promote reconciliation, while a Restorative City is a comprehensive concept aimed at creating a just, equitable society by addressing both personal and systemic harms.

A Restorative City not only implements restorative practices, but also seeks broader social transformation by creating a culture of justice that goes beyond individual conflict and challenges existing justice systems to better serve all members of society.

Defining Restorative Justice practices in a City	Defining a Restorative City
People are always at the heart of a conflict, a victim and an offender who need to reconcile	People, policies, situations can be at the heart of seeking justice, speaks about people/ parties involved instead of victim vs. offender
Conflict is the core of activities	Justice is the core of activities
Seeks reconciliation: Resolving conflicts is the core of the Restorative City	Seeks justice: Creating justice in society, even with the absence of conflicts
Implementing restorative justice practices (mediation, peace circles) are the goal	Implementing restorative justice practices is one of the many means to seek justice
A Restorative City is a means to advance/ promote restorative justice	A Restorative City is a way to create justice in society
Focus on solutions on a micro level (relational level, dialogues)	Focus on micro-, meso- and macro-level solutions between people affected by injustice (which then influences change at the micro-level).
Does not/ rarely apply transformative justice in its work	Transformative justice at the core of its work

The distinction between defining restorative justice practices in a city and the broader definition of a Restorative City reveals two complementary but distinct approaches to achieving justice in society.

The differences between these approaches can be grouped into five key aspects: 1. Focus of Justice, 2. Goals, 3. Scope of implementation, 4. Relation to the criminal justice system, 5. Use of Transformative Justice.

1. Focus of Justice

Restorative Justice Practices in a City: These practices emphasize the immediate, interpersonal dimensions of conflict. They usually involve a specific "victim" and "offender" who seek to reconcile, placing the focus on individuals affected by direct harm. Conflict resolution is central, with efforts directed at repairing relationships and reaching personal reconciliation.

Restorative City: A Restorative City expands the scope of justice beyond individual conflicts to include a broader pursuit of justice across various social contexts. It recognizes that justice may not always involve an identifiable victim and an incarcerated individual. Instead, people, policies, and systems are seen as integral to achieving justice, which the city aims to promote across society, even in the absence of specific conflicts.

2. Goals

Restorative Justice Practices in a City: The main goal of these practices is to resolve conflicts directly through mediation, peace circles, and other restorative methods. Conflict resolution itself is the primary objective, and justice is pursued one case at a time, often after harm has occurred.

Restorative City: In a Restorative City, implementing restorative practices is part of a larger, ongoing commitment to creating an environment where justice is embedded in the community's structures and culture. Conflict resolution is just one piece of a broader vision, with the city's goal being to create a just society proactively. Justice here means creating conditions for equity, inclusion, and well-being for all, not only addressing harm but also preventing it.

3. Use of Transformative Justice

Restorative Justice Practices in a City: These practices focus on direct healing and repair and typically do not apply transformative justice, which aims to address the root causes of systemic harm. They focus on mending relationships in specific cases.

Restorative City: Transformative justice is at the core of a Restorative City's approach. The city aims to address deeper social issues—like poverty, discrimination, and inequality—that contribute to harm in the first place. This broader view works to transform the underlying conditions that create injustice, aligning with the principles of transformative justice by changing systems, not just addressing symptoms.

4. Relation to the Criminal Justice System

Restorative Justice Practices in a City: These practices generally complement the criminal justice system and do not challenge its foundations. They operate alongside traditional systems, offering an alternative way to resolve conflicts but often within the same framework of "offender" and "victim."

Restorative City: A Restorative City challenges the traditional criminal justice system by promoting a justice model that goes beyond punishment. It questions the effectiveness of conventional justice and seeks alternatives or replacements that prioritize healing and equity. A Restorative City encourages changes in policy, culture, and infrastructure to address harm.

5. Scope of implementation

Restorative Justice Practices in a City: The practices primarily function on a micro-level, focusing on relational solutions through direct dialogue between those affected. These practices seek to restore individual relationships and promote accountability and empathy between specific people involved.

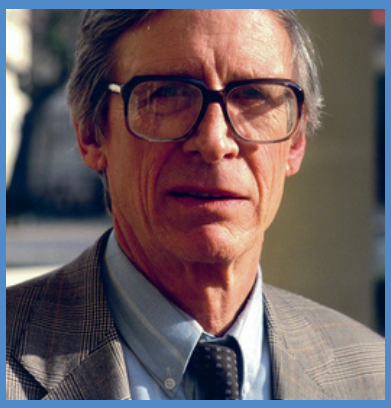
Restorative City: A Restorative City operates on micro-, meso- and macro-levels, addressing not only individual conflicts but also systemic issues. It tackles social, economic, and policy-level injustices that contribute to harm or healing, promoting changes in institutions and culture that will then influence interactions at the micro-level. It works toward systemic transformation, which can help prevent harm from arising in the first place.

From Theory to Practice: Applying Justice Paradigms

Theories of justice offer vital insights into the principles of fairness, accountability, and equity that shape our societies. However, to truly understand their relevance, we must explore how these theories manifest in real-world applications. In this section, we will delve into three illustrative examples that demonstrate the practical implications of justice paradigms: John Rawls' theoretical contributions, particularly his concept of the Veil of Ignorance, the Grenfell Tower fire in the United Kingdom and Arna Mackic's architectural philosophy.

"Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."

John Rawls, A Theory of Justice



In most democratic societies, criminal justice frameworks are shaped by elements of retributive, restorative, and transformative justice. These approaches are combined in ways that prioritize punishment, rehabilitation, and social reform to varying extents. At the foundation of many of these frameworks is the work of philosopher John Rawls, whose theories provide a profound influence on modern conceptions of justice, fairness, and equality.

Justice as Fairness

John Rawls (1921–2002) was an American philosopher renowned for his contributions to political philosophy. His landmark work, A Theory of Justice (1971), introduced ideas that have since become central to discussions of justice and societal equality. Rawls' approach, known as "justice as fairness," emphasizes two key principles intended to create a just society that considers the well-being of all members, especially the disadvantaged.

Key principles of Rawls' Theory;

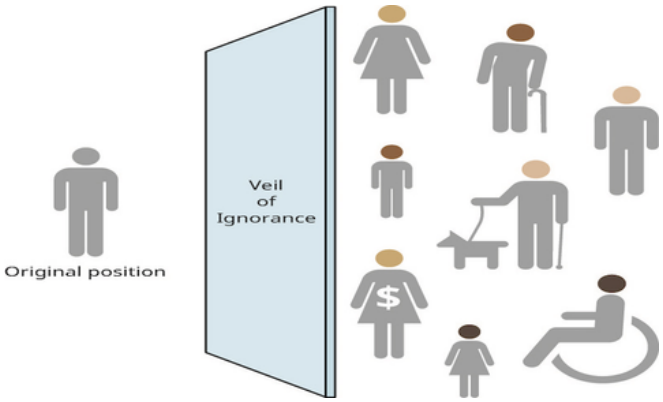
Equal Basic Liberties: Each individual is entitled to a set of fundamental rights and freedoms that must remain inviolate. These include freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, among others.

The Difference Principle: Economic and social inequalities are permitted only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Additionally, everyone should have equal opportunity to access positions of power or wealth.

Veil of Ignorance

To develop his theory of justice, Rawls introduced the concept of the "original position" and the "veil of ignorance."

Imagine a group of individuals tasked with designing the rules and principles that will govern a society. To ensure fairness, these individuals are placed behind a "veil of ignorance," meaning they have no knowledge of personal details such as their social class (e.g., rich or poor), race or ethnicity, gender, abilities or disabilities, talents or intelligence, religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal preferences and life goals.



John Rawls - original position

The idea is that, by being unaware of these personal characteristics, individuals are more likely to choose principles that are fair to all, rather than favoring principles that would benefit them personally. Since they do not know whether they will be rich or poor, male or female, healthy or disabled, they must create rules that they would accept from any position once the veil is lifted.

This concept is often illustrated by the metaphor of a cake that each person designs without knowing which piece they will receive, ensuring they would choose an equal distribution of resources and opportunities.

Mass Incarceration in the United States

Bill Clinton, who served as U.S. president from 1993 to 2001, was influenced by John Rawls's ideas, particularly those presented in A Theory of Justice. Clinton found Rawls's views on fairness, equality, and the importance of addressing social disadvantages compelling, often citing Rawls as a significant intellectual influence. Rawls's concept of "justice as fairness," including his Difference Principle, argues that social and economic inequalities are only justified if they benefit the least advantaged. From this perspective, a just criminal justice system would aim to protect fundamental liberties, rehabilitate individuals, and offer equitable opportunities to all, particularly those facing disadvantages.

Despite his intellectual admiration for Rawls, Clinton's policy decisions—especially his "tough on crime" measures like the 1994 crime bill—often contradicted these principles. The bill, written in the 1990s by then-Senator Joe Biden, included provisions that increased penalties, expanded the prison system, and provided funding for more police officers. A key element was the endorsement of the "three strikes" law, which mandated life sentences for individuals convicted of a third felony, even if the offense was minor or nonviolent.

Intended to reduce crime by removing offenders from society, these measures instead contributed to mass incarceration and disproportionately impacted low-income and minority communities, counter to Rawls's Difference Principle, which advocates for policies that uplift the least advantaged.

Clinton's "tough on crime" approach highlighted a significant tension between his intellectual ideals and his policy choices. While Rawls advocated for social systems that mitigate inequality, the 1994 crime bill ultimately intensified disparities within the criminal justice system, underscoring the complex relationship between political ideology and governance.

Grenfell Tower Fire

One example of how systems in society can fail us gravely is the fire that broke out in the Grenfell Tower in London, England, in 2017. The Grenfell Tower fire is a powerful case for transformative justice because it demonstrates the need for a justice model that doesn't stop at punishing individuals but instead advocates for structural change, empowers communities, and addresses the inequalities and neglect that led to such a preventable tragedy.

On 14 June 2017, a fire broke out in the 24-story Grenfell Tower in Kensington, London, lasting for 60 hours and claiming the lives of 72 people. What began as a tragic residential fire would, seven years later, report implicating governmental institutions and corporations. As one newspaper summarized the report, 'Unscrupulous' manufacturers of dangerous materials, 'dishonesty and greed' and regulatory failure all caused the disaster.



"There were many opportunities for the government to identify the risks posed by the use of combustible cladding panels and insulation, particularly to high-rise buildings, and to take action in relation to them"

- The Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 2 Report

"Prime Minister Keir Starmer apologised to the relatives of victims and survivors on behalf of the state following the report, saying they had been failed for years. "It should never have happened. The country failed to discharge its most fundamental duty, to protect you and your loved ones," he said in a statement to parliament. "Today is a long awaited day of truth, but it must now lead to a day of justice,' he added."

- The Guardian

"Seven Years After Grenfell Disaster: Homes of Hundreds of Thousands of Britons Still Unsafe"

- The Guardian

"Today is a long awaited day of truth, but it must now lead to a day of justice"

- The Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Final Report

The Grenfell Tower fire tragically illustrates the need for transformative justice by highlighting how deep systemic inequalities and institutional failures can lead to catastrophic consequences. Transformative justice, which seeks to address the root causes of harm, advocate for systemic change, and empower affected communities, is particularly relevant in understanding and responding to the Grenfell disaster.

Here is how the Grenfell Tower fire exemplifies why transformative justice is necessary:

Systemic inequality and neglect:



The residents of Grenfell Tower, many of whom were from low-income, marginalized, and immigrant communities, had voiced safety concerns for years. These concerns included fire hazards and inadequate maintenance, but they were largely ignored. Transformative justice would require addressing these systemic issues, such as socio-economic inequality, institutional neglect, and the disregard for the well-being of low-income residents, which contributed to the conditions that made the fire so deadly.

Power imbalances and accountability:



A key aspect of transformative justice is addressing power imbalances. In the case of Grenfell, the power was in the hands of landlords, management companies, and regulatory bodies who failed to act on residents' concerns. Transformative justice would involve holding these entities accountable, not just through legal processes but through a cultural shift in how authorities engage with vulnerable communities. This includes ensuring that residents have a meaningful voice in decision-making about their housing and safety.

Community-led healing and empowerment:



Transformative justice advocates for healing through community-led approaches, acknowledging that true justice involves meeting the needs of those most impacted. For Grenfell survivors, justice is not only about prosecuting individuals but also about providing long-term support, recognizing the trauma experienced, and enabling community rebuilding. This would mean investing in mental health support, housing security, and long-term care for survivors and affected families.

Addressing policy and regulatory failures:



Transformative justice in response to Grenfell would mean reforming housing policies, fire safety regulations, and enforcement practices to ensure that a tragedy like this never happens again. This approach goes beyond punishment and seeks to change the underlying structures that allowed the neglect to happen, including inadequate building codes, insufficient fire safety standards, and weak regulatory oversight.

The principles highlighted in the Grenfell Tower case align closely with the aims of a Restorative City. However, unlike responses triggered solely by severe incidents, a Restorative City proactively addresses and prevents injustice across the community. It is dedicated to building justice collaboratively, ensure accountability, and promoting fairness throughout the city.

Architecture of Disaster and Collective Healing



Arna Mackic

Architect Arna Mackic insightfully observes that buildings and spaces have the power to either harm or heal; they are not simply neutral backdrops but active elements that shape our collective well-being. In her view, justice within a city is rarely confined to just two individuals—it emerges from the complex interactions of numerous people, institutions, and corporations that influence the urban landscape. The Grenfell Tower fire illustrates how these very institutions, entrusted with public welfare, can fail catastrophically. Such failures call into question the morality and integrity of these organizations, forcing society to confront the underlying systems that enabled such a tragedy. The Grenfell fire, with its devastating scale and implications, is just one among many examples showing how entire structures of power can sometimes betray the very people they are meant to protect.

In Mackic's work, the concepts of accountability and healing are brought to life through architecture. She envisions a society where spaces marked by architectural disaster are not left as painful reminders but are transformed into areas that support and uplift those affected. This approach to accountability transcends punishment, focusing instead on rebuilding trust within communities.

By reimagining and reconstructing spaces impacted by violence or neglect, Mackic offers a pathway forward—a vision of healing and reconciliation embedded in the built environment itself.

Mackic believes that spaces of pain and loss should be intentionally reshaped to develop healing and resilience within communities. Her vision requires institutions to take responsibility not only by preventing harm but by actively contributing to the healing process. In this way, she redefines justice as more than merely addressing wrongs; it's about rebuilding society to restore trust and safeguard against future harm. Her work serves as a call to action for architects, urban planners, and policymakers alike, urging them to see every building, neighborhood, and city as potential sites of justice and healing, designed to uphold the dignity and safety of all who inhabit them.





Scope of implementation: Theory Chris Argyris (Knowledge for Action)

The theory of action, Knowledge for Action, developed by social psychologist Chris Argyris and his colleague Donald Schön, provides a useful framework for understanding and implementing the concept of a Restorative City. This theory explores the gap between espoused theories (what people say they believe and intend to do) and theories-in-use (the actions they actually take). This difference often reveals a gap between intentions and real actions, particularly when individuals or organizations face complex challenges or conflicts. **By examining change across micro (individual), meso (community), and macro (institutional) levels**, the theory of action helps us see how personal behaviors, community interactions, and broader societal structures can work together within a Restorative City.

As we examine various forms of injustice and inequality within society, we often find that problems emerge at the micro or meso level, such as individual experiences of discrimination or exclusion. However, solutions may need to be addressed at the macro level, through systemic change in policies, institutions, or community resources. This is where the theory of action becomes a valuable tool within the concept of a Restorative City.

To foster learning within an organization (or society etc.) as a whole, insights from different levels must converge. This can be achieved by creating a learning infrastructure that connects these levels and supports growth across **three distinct orders of learning**. To illustrate this, we will apply the theory to **an example of youth violence in a neighborhood in Amsterdam**:

01

Causal Learning - 1st order

Increase police presence in the neighborhood, set up surveillance cameras, and implement quick interventions such as arresting individuals involved in violent acts. These actions aim to reduce immediate incidents of violence..

02

Reflectively Learning - 2nd order

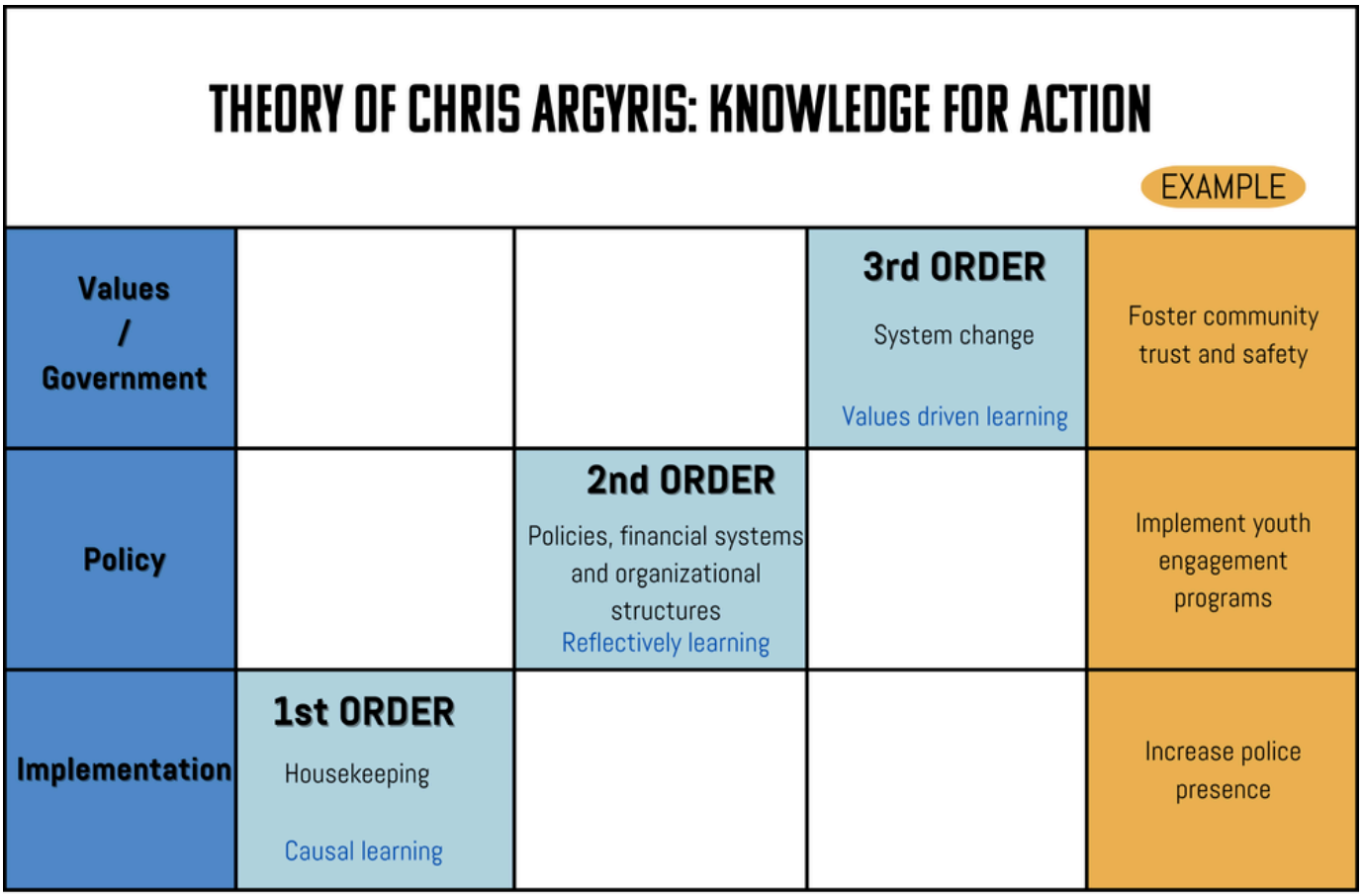
Analyze community dynamics to identify underlying issues. This may include examining factors like poverty, lack of recreational opportunities, and social isolation. Solutions could involve creating youth engagement programs, sports activities, and community events that foster interaction and belonging.

03

Values Driven Learning - 3rd order

Address systemic factors contributing to fear and insecurity. This could involve revising urban planning to ensure safe public spaces, building partnerships between residents and local authorities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and support. Encouraging community dialogue and collaboration can help residents feel safer and more empowered.

Theory of Chris Argyris: Knowledge for Action



CityHubs

In 2023, 2024, and 2025 RESCALED and Restorative Justice Netherlands, together with the local health- and justice sector, will explore the relationship between detention houses and the dynamic interaction with their local urban, economic, and social context.

Community life is central to this approach, requiring tailored solutions based on the individual needs of those involved and the needs of the community. A Restorative City aims to find just solutions together with all stakeholders in redressing injustice (in the broadest sense). In addition to or instead of punishing the perpetrator, the focus is on forward-looking solutions and also on righting past injustices. Creating a Restorative City requires an integrated approach in which government agencies, community organizations, and residents work together to build a city. In this urban context, a Restorative City strives to create a social, just, and equal environment.

In the City Hubs, we promote inclusivity through detention houses. By inclusive, we are referring to societies that leave no one behind. Societies characterized by mutual trust, safety, belonging, and access to education, work, health care, and a strong local community. We also focus on creating a safe society. By safe, we are referring to the effects detention has on public safety. When prison becomes a place of containment, passivity, uncertainty and frustration, the people who are released will be in the same position or worse off by the day of release. If people do something meaningful with the time they are incarcerated and stay connected to community-life, they will have better preconditions to succeed. This shared responsibility could over time reduce recidivism and lead to safer societies. Finally, RJN strives to create a sustainable society: socially, economically, and ecologically.

Large prisons far removed from society are not a sustainable solution in the long run. Detention houses:

- Can be transformed at any time into more conventional facilities (**ecological sustainability**);
- Can generate their own income by providing goods and services to local communities and are integrated into the local economy (**economic sustainability**);
- Can ensure a more successful reintegration of citizens and lead to lower recidivism and future harm (**social sustainability**).

So far, we have created two City Hub books about Utrecht and Eindhoven, exploring the concept of a Restorative City in relation to detention houses.

INSPIRE
DETENTION HOUSES IN RESTORATIVE CITIES

RESTORATIVE CITIES

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