

The architecture of a probation office: a reflection of policy and an impact on practice

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The Architecture of a Probation Office: a reflection of policy and an impact on practice

Abstract

This article illustrates how the physicality of a probation office can be considered both integral to, and representative of, several important changes in the probation service's recent history through analysis of research conducted in a probation office. I suggest that the relationship between the 'protected' zone of the office and the 'unprotected' zone of the waiting area and interview rooms is similar to Goffman's 'frontstage' and 'backstage' and expand on his theory of social action by describing how the architecture of probation represents and potentially perpetuates the rise of risk, punishment and managerialism in probation. The article then moves onto the exterior and location of the office to look at how these represent probation's move away from the communities it serves as well as inadvertently increasing the amount of punishment certain offenders receive. This has significant consequences if the policy of probation moves towards modes of practice which no longer prioritise standardisation and punishment over professional judgment and the importance of the offender-officer relationship and the article concludes by looking to some examples of more inclusive forms of office design and architecture.

Keywords: probation practice; architecture; managerialism; risk; punitiveness

Introduction

This paper addresses a question about the probation service which has received little attention: what can the architecture of a probation office tell us about probation practice

and probation policy? Looking at architecture in a criminological setting is a useful and informative exercise because:

‘the places where anger management groups meet, the rooms where parole hearings are held, ... and especially ... the administrative spaces of offices' where workers and managers create reports, Initial Sentence Plans, Pre-sentence reports and risk assessments are equally important [as the ‘monumental imagery of the supermax’] and define the nature of the penal experience. They are the places where penalty takes shape, containing and conferring meaning on the objects that are necessary to translate policy into practice’ (Armstrong and McAra, 2006: 23-24 emphasis added).

This is all the more compelling because attention has recently been (re)directed towards the importance of the offender-officer relationship, desistance theory and offender engagement. This puts us in a position where probation offices reflect a policy underpinned by risk management and punishment when policy itself might be moving towards a more engaged method of working with offenders through the Offender Engagement Project as well as, possibly, the Government’s intention to implement a ‘rehabilitation revolution’. This article argues, therefore, that if policy moves in this direction, policy makers will need to consider the impact of offices which were designed for something different altogether. As will be discussed, evidence shows that buildings and the lay out of offices can have an impact on the way people behave and work but this has not been considered in the context of probation.

Architecture and Sociology

Newman uses the term 'architecture' to explain the nature of society: 'like buildings, societies have a design discernible to the alert eye. Both are constructed by bringing together a wide variety of materials in a complex process. Both, through their structure, shape the activities within' (2010: 1). I take the word 'architecture' more literally in this article, but start from Newman's basic premise that structures, be they physical or societal, shape action. Furthermore, Bourdieu describes how the sociologist must be aware of the way interactions are shaped because 'people who are very distant from each other can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently, in physical space' (Bourdieu, 1989: 16 emphasis added). What this means, for the social researcher, is that attention must be paid to the fact that interactions 'mask the structures that are realized within them. This is one of those cases where the visible, that which is immediately given [the interaction], hides the invisible which determines it' (Bourdieu, 1989: 16). Sociology, therefore, provides us with a theoretical starting point for examining the architecture of probation: one which highlights the need to not only accept that architecture (whether it is physical or societal) shapes behaviour but to look beyond extant interactions in the probation to discover what it is that is shaping behaviour. This is not to say that the physical aspect of the probation office is the only relevant factor when attempting a description of probation practice but that it does deserve more attention than it has thus far received.

Architecture and Criminology

Looking at the architecture of a prison is perhaps the most obvious use of architecture in the criminological literature: after all, prisons have a physical structure for all to see. Some prison buildings hold more symbolic power than others: for example, the gates of

Wandsworth prison are recognisable to many British people; and the outlines of prison hulks evoke memories of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* or the Conservative Government's need to use prison ships during the 1980s. How prison buildings affect the behaviour within the prison has been looked at, with Sparks, Bottoms and Hay concluding that 'the design of prison buildings play a central part of in shaping the nature of the day-to-day routines' because the 'prison building is the instrument of incarceration' (1996: 229). Furthermore, Jewkes and Johnston provide a detailed analysis of the evolution of prison architecture outlining the behavioural and symbolic importance of prison architecture:

The design of a prison impacts upon the lives of its occupants- inmates and staff- in a myriad of obvious and subtle ways. Furthermore... prisons stand as symbolic or allegorical statements of penal philosophy. Political judgements, policy priorities and public sentiments all play a role in the design, construction and location of penal institutions, and the symbolic and ideological forms with which prison buildings are invested have a vital role to play in explaining the internal power relations of the regime. (2007: 191)

Wortley, on the other hand, focuses on how situational crime prevention can be used to decrease the amount of crime which occurs within a prison (2002) whereas Fairweather and McConville's (2000) edited volume is more descriptive of the evolution of prison buildings. In reviewing Fairweather and McConville, Bosworth makes the relevant point 'that criminologists need to spend more time examining architecture, given that the design of a building will greatly affect those held within it' (2003: 635). It is clear that the architecture of a prison does have some impact on the way a prison operates, both in

terms of prisoner and staff experiences and the role the prison plays in the public's psyche. As such, architecture has been taken seriously in the design of new prisons with, for example, Halden Prison in Norway being 'designed to ensure prisoners did not re-offend' (The Telegraph, 2010).

Architecture plays an important role in the theory of situational crime prevention (SCP): 'a set of recipes for steering and channelling behaviour in ways that reduce the occurrence of criminal events' (Garland, 2000: 1). SCP is more concerned with the prevention of crime than the treatment of criminals but the fact that the use of architecture, in the form of CCTV cameras, higher and better fences around property, alarms, stronger reinforcements on entry points etc., is crucial to this practice and bears similarities to the architecture of prison described above. The inclusion of CCTV in the armoury of SCP suggests that architecture does not have to be restricted to 'bricks and mortar': that architecture can be more 'virtual'.

In this sense, Jones (2006) has used Lessig's concept of 'code' (1999, 2006) to look at Bottoms' model of compliance, SCP and electronic monitoring. Lessig's model allows us to see how physical constraints have an impact on behaviour in the context of criminology. More importantly for this article, the model allows us to see how architecture 'can be seen as having values embedded within it, and how the social and communicative activities this code permits are thus influenced by the code's embedded values' (Jones, 2006: 178). The way a building (or anything, for that matter) is designed, holds some intrinsic value which is then imparted onto the users of the building: 'code codifies values' (Lessig, 1999: 59). It is with this in mind that I consider the role of

architecture in probation.

Architecture and Probation

It is clear from the discussion so far that architecture is more than simply what a building looks like: rather, it concerns the way a building or virtual constraint impacts on social action as well as how it reflects the climate in which it was designed. Following on from this, probation can be seen to have ‘an architecture’ in two ways: firstly, the very probation offices in which probation work takes place and, secondly, a more ephemeral architecture in the form of home detention curfews or risk management plans which serve to control offenders when they are away from the physical office. This paper deals mainly with the first of these. However, I take a similar stance to Jones (2006) and Lessig (1999) in arguing that the way something is designed has an intrinsic value and an impact on the way people behave. There are similarities with Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984) here, although Lessig’s conceptualisation relies on ‘something’ more tangible than the constraints of social structures in Giddens’ theory. For the purposes of this article, that ‘something’ is the design, layout and location of a probation building.

Methodology

This data on which this article is based were collected through a six-month period of observation in a probation office in the North of England in 2010. The research was focused primarily on how offender managers¹ (OM) interact with offenders, colleagues,

¹ I use the term offender manager to denote probation officers and probation services officers. Where relevant I distinguish between the two.

and policy with a focus on compliance, discretion, managerialism, rehabilitation and risk management. In addition to, and as part of, this I observed how the architecture of the building creates, affects and perpetuates particular ways of working with offenders. This research, therefore, is a case study, the reliability, replicability and validity of which ‘depends in large part on how far the researcher feels that these are appropriate for the evaluation of case study research’ (Bryman, 2004: 50). As such, what I describe is not likely to, nor is it intended to, reflect the situation across the country. Rather, the intention is to present a theoretical explanation of how the physicality of a probation office affects probation practice. Nevertheless, some of the features of this office are typical of probation offices across the country: the CCTV, the locked doors between the waiting room and the office space, the protected reception space and the private interview rooms with panic buttons. What follows can therefore be described as ideographic with nomothetic potential: i.e. this analysis could have normative application when looking at probation work in different buildings and is important should new probation offices be designed. The case study is perhaps best seen as an ‘exemplifying case’ and thus provides both theoretical and empirical beginnings which can be built upon through further research and incorporated into policy.

The Probation Office

The research was conducted in an office which covers, in terms of geographical remit, one half of a large city in the north of England, and houses six offender management units (OMU). The office underwent a complete refurbishment several years ago and was therefore designed specifically for the purpose of probation in the early twenty-first century. The OMUs are arranged across two floors: the specialist services of Unpaid

Work and Victim Services are based downstairs with the 'generic' OMUs upstairs. This OMU / specialist services split reflects the move away from specialist probation officers towards generic caseloads held by OMs after the implementation of the Offender Management Act 2007 (Raynor and Vanstone, 2007: 74). The inclusion of a victim services unit reflects the 'remarkable return of the victim to centre stage in criminal justice policy' (Garland, 2001: 11). Despite this, 'the victim' was remarkably absent during fieldwork and I observed an assumption that victims' needs would be dealt with by others. This physical split, therefore, could be seen to hinder the absorption of the victim into probation practice although, arguably, policies around disclosure which prohibit OMs from contacting victims may be a greater barrier. As well as the OMUs the lower storey of the building housed administrative staff, a reception, waiting area and interview rooms. Although it used to be the case that probation officers would see offenders in their own private offices, this practice has been superseded by dedicated interview rooms separate from the office space.

Although there are distinct teams in the form of OMUs, the office areas are open plan. This makes communication between members of staff easy and efficient and collaboration was a distinct feature of the work observed. This idea contrasts with the idea of the probation officer as 'technocrat' who must simply follow the rules and tick the boxes (Bailey et al., 2007). However, the design of the office also created tensions: for example, OMs are increasingly being encouraged to work with offenders in prison by use of a telephone conference call and the noise in the office would make this difficult. The increased use of technology in the probation service which stems from resourcing issues (it is costly in terms of time and money to do a prison visit) is therefore being

affected by the use of this open plan, collaborative design.

The managers' offices are located around the edge of the main office areas and are often close to the team they oversee. Each office has its own door which is only closed during staff supervision sessions or when the manager is accessing confidential data. Thus, managers describe having an 'open door policy'. This can be seen as a 'strateg[y] of condescension... by which agents who occupy a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space symbolically deny the social distance between themselves and others, a distance which does not thereby cease to exist (Bourdieu, 1989: 16). This spatial separation creates and perpetuates a feeling of them and us between management and staff, a sentiment which might not be considered healthy in an organisation where managerialism can be described as hegemonic². This separation was evident at times of team bonding when the manager would be automatically excluded because of his or her physical location outside of the team. That said, a senior manager in the Trust commented that managers at the Ministry of Justice do not have their own offices yet there is still a clear 'them' and 'us'. This highlights the need to be critical of architectural determinism and explore the reasons that lie behind certain actions.

² I am not implying here that managerialism is inherently negative, although it has attracted a pejorative reputation over recent years. In fact, the majority of OMs in my sample agreed that the introduction of managerialist modes of practice were necessary and continue to be important and relevant in focusing energies and resources in the right areas. However, OMs also complained that targets were becoming the 'be all and end all' in certain areas of work and that pressure to meet timeliness targets were pulling them away from face to face work with offenders.

The Backstage

All office areas are behind fob controlled doors so that no offender could (or should) ever be in these areas. This means that staff are able to speak confidentially about clients. Moreover, as the building is surrounded by a fence, there is little possibility for paperwork to be seen from the street, something which became important during fieldwork after NAPO reported that Phil Wheatley, the then Director General of NOMS, had done just this (Fletcher, 2009: 3). The office areas represent, therefore, 'a zone of total confidentiality' which is clearly advantageous when dealing with sensitive data relating to offenders, victims and witnesses. However, this heightened level of confidentiality allows staff to be dismissive of offenders' excuses for not attending and be sceptical of their reasons for offending. It must be noted, however, that these utterances were often done casually and in a jocular manner. This way of talking about an institution's clientele in confidential areas is not only seen in the context of probation. Both Waddington (1999) and Crawley (2004) have observed the use of humour in criminal justice institutions, with Crawley arguing that 'humour is palliative' (2004: 419). On the other hand, such talk can be conceived as malign, as in the MacPherson Report which states that 'the police canteen can too easily be [racism's] breeding ground' (1999: 6.17). It is imperative, therefore, to decide whether the architecture of probation encourages potentially malign attitudes towards offenders. One OM suggested that this aspect of probation culture errs on the side of benign: 'it's about stress relief, I don't see it as a problem' (Fieldnotes, 10 February 2010) whilst another stressed that it is not canteen culture:

...we tend to come across as a bit blasé- it is not canteen culture- it is not that strong but there is a degree of a sense of us and them developing... We

can come across as being flippant but we aren't (PO, Interview)

Nevertheless, the architecture of the building, and the fact that staff are so secure and separate from their clients enables and perpetuates this way of working.

Because of the nature of the office areas, one might argue that the office is the 'backstage' of probation work because, 'the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude' (Goffman, 1969: 116). However, the office could also be the frontstage which comprises the 'furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it (Goffman, 1969: 32–33).

The open plan nature of the office encourages such a view, particularly when management are involved. As already mentioned, collaboration was a key feature of work in probation. However, at times, an approaching manager would result in changed behaviour from OMs. This would most often manifest by OMs stopping what they were doing and turning back to their computer screens. What this does is make the OM complicit in creating a definition of probation in which the computer is a key and consistent prop. This chimes with findings from the recent Justice Committee report which found that 74% of an OM's time is spent doing administrative work as opposed to face-to-face work with offenders (2011). The office, therefore, can be seen as a stage in that there was a sense of 'them and us' even within this enclosed space. This is confirmed by comments from several OMs that I was 'one of them' – this would often

precede the OM telling me something that might be unsuitable to be shared with all colleagues such as a lewd joke, or information about a job they were applying for. The office, therefore, can be conceived of as the front or backstage of probation.

The Frontstage

An alternative frontstage in probation is the waiting room and interview rooms. To express this in Goffman's terms is important because the frontstage 'functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (1969: 32). When discussing the problem of speaking derogatorily about clients arising from 'zones of total confidentiality' it is necessary to consider the 'relationship between culture and action' and accept that 'if occupational culture is to serve as an empirically satisfactory concept as well as a theoretically necessary one, the sense of its internal variations and textures must be brought out' (Fielding, 1988: 185). Considering the differences between behaviour in the front- and backstages is a way of achieving an empirically and theoretically sound concept of probation culture because it allows for the similarities and discrepancies in what OMs say and do to be drawn out. What happens in this arena defines, or at least contributes to the definition of, probation for the offenders themselves. When in the frontstage zone, staff are friendly and polite to offenders (although the nature of the job requires people to be firm and challenging at times). I would often see OMs greet people in the waiting room even if they weren't on their caseload and there was an air of mutual respect and, in many respects, a casual tone to encounters in the frontstage.

The waiting room is reasonably large with about 15 metal chairs around the edge of the

room. There are three toilets, a baby changing room and a water machine. The walls are painted a light blue colour and are adorned with posters detailing the Service's responsibilities to offenders, motivational posters encouraging people to change, and advertisements of the different services on offer. That the waiting room is not completely sterile and functional suggests that probationers are not seen merely as members of a group who need managing but are individuals who have basic needs beyond reducing their offending through the provision of a toilet, for example (it is interesting to compare this with the local jobcentre which would not allow 'clients' to use a toilet or drink water in the building). That offenders are seen as acceptable recipients of advertising also suggests a move towards seeing the offender as a 'customer' and/or service user. This could reflect the theory that the increasing visibility of Community Payback might be justified on the basis of a 'new market state' although in this circumstance it is offenders instead of the community who have some element of 'consumer choice' (Bottoms, 2008: 155). The posters and generally amenable state of the waiting room might also be reflective of former Director General of NOMS Phil Wheatley's recent use of the term 'Service User' in relation to offenders (James, 2010). This is not to say that the term 'offender' has been completely accepted by OMs: I observed several instances of offenders being referred to as 'clients', but there was a general feeling that offenders was the 'Service's' preferred term³.

The interview rooms are located along a long, windowless corridor which leads away from the waiting room. The corridor has several fob-controlled security doors along it so

³ There was similar opposition to the term offender manager with, mainly more experienced, OMs emphasizing to me that they were still probation officers, regardless of their official title.

that offenders cannot access the interview rooms without being accompanied by a member of staff. However, it is possible to move back towards the waiting room without a fob as the doors in this direction are opened by pressing a button. All the interview rooms except one have windows, often with the blinds drawn. They each have two doors – one leading on to the corridor with the other being an ‘escape door’ leading to the next for use in cases of emergencies.

There are two panic buttons in each room – one by the main door and one on the desk. Offenders are normally directed to sit at the end of the desk allowing the OM easy access to either door. This pattern of directing the offender where to sit can be interpreted as the OM exerting their control on a client in much the same way as Whyte describes a waitress’s or teacher’s actions, ‘so there is never any question as to who is in charge’ (Whyte, 1946: 132-133 cited in Goffman, 1969: 23). The setting, therefore, helps an OM to ‘get off on the right foot’ and sets the tone for future interactions (Goffman, 1969: 23). Goffman argues that ‘the initial definition of the situation projected by an individual... has a distinctive moral character’ (1969: 23–24). This raises a tension between the way many participants described wanting to treat offenders with respect and equality (these are two of the ‘official’ values of this Probation Trust). The design of the interview rooms appears to militate against the possibility of this happening. The design of the interview rooms can therefore be seen as a physical manifestation of the power differential between staff and offenders.

All interview rooms have CCTV which is viewable from reception (discussed below). CCTV in general doesn’t feature much in the everyday life of probation work (I

witnessed only one incident in which the OM asked reception staff to 'keep an eye' on the CCTV). However, once probationers enter the waiting room, corridor and interview rooms they are (potentially) under constant surveillance and the building design implies that they are not to be trusted. This reflects two aspects of probation policy. The first is that, in contrast to the individualistic nature of interactions in the waiting room or the desire by OMs to treat people as individuals, they are now treated as part of an aggregate group of offenders as described by Feeley and Simon in 'The New Penology' (1992).

The second is more metaphorical and reflects the historical idea of probation as a sentence by consent. Although the requirement for offenders to consent to probation was repealed by Section 38 of the Crime (Sentences) Act (1997), the concept of consent is still important. NOMS have recently introduced the 'community compact' which lays out what each party can expect from the period of probation supervision: importantly the offender can refuse to sign this compact although they will still be subject to breach proceedings as if they had signed the form – consent, here, is purely an illusion to encourage compliance. OMs give offenders an illusion of consent in other ways when, for example, an offender was given the choice of not participating in a PSR interview for an offence that they denied committing. Whilst the offender could be seen to have choice around whether to comply, it was illusory because they subsequently faced the consequence of an insubstantial pre-sentence report which tended towards prison rather than a community order. This illusory aspect of consent, which is common in the service, is reflected in the building. Offenders are able to leave the building unhindered, reflecting the idea that they can, if they want, cease to comply with the service. However, when they leave the building they do not fall outwith the remit of the

probation service because of the virtual side of probation's architecture described above such as home detention curfews, residency orders and warrants issued by the court for non-compliance. The physical layout of the corridor has important metaphorical allusions: to move forward without assistance is impossible whereas to leave without permission is feasible but ultimately illusory. An offender may want to move forward in their lives but this can be slowed down by a variety of factors: a lack of capacity on programmes, a lack of flexibility in programme eligibility, or a lack of time on the part of the OM to spend sufficient time with someone to assess the risk that they pose and, if necessary to record any change. That all this occurs within the frontstage of probation suggests that this kind of working, which is both created by and reflected in the building itself, represents part of the definition of probation presented by staff to offenders.

The Wings

The reception area is at one end of the waiting room with a large glass window separating the two. There are no holes in the glass: communication is done via a microphone system which the receptionist controls by pressing a button. When the button is not pressed the glass is soundproof. There is a drawer at the bottom of the window through which documents can be passed. People in reception can therefore be seen by offenders, but not necessarily heard. Confidential conversations can occur in reception but there is a constant need to remember that a conversation may be overheard if the microphone button is pressed by a colleague – it does not represent a zone of total confidentiality. Reception, therefore, is vulnerable to a ‘backstage difficulty’ which can result in someone knowing more about someone else than they perhaps should (Goffman, 1969: 121–122). To extend Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor, this area can

be seen as the wings of the theatre where an actor can be seen or heard by the audience depending on what is happening in the frontstage. The backstage difficulty requires probation officers to adopt a frontstage performance, as seen in the waiting room, while simultaneously adopting a backstage persona. The design of the building, therefore not only disciplines the body of an offender by restricting their movement it also disciplines the OM. This area of the probation building represents the power held by the probation service over offenders because they can be let in when staff so desire, and excluded when this is not deemed necessary. That probation staff hold some element of power over their clients is hardly surprising; debates have occurred around the potential conflict of 'care and control' for many years. The staff with whom I spoke about this recognised the potential for this conflict but were simultaneously untroubled by it, that is, they were happy to help their clients when they needed it but were also happy to 'shop 'em' (Fieldnotes, 17 November 2009) when necessary. As well as holding disciplinary potential over staff, the reception area can be seen as a physical manifestation of this power differential between OMs and their clients.

The Exterior

In addition to considering the internal aspect of probation's architecture, it is important to consider the exterior of the building, as well as its location. This is particularly important because we are in an era of probation work where home visits are increasingly rare⁴, offices in some areas (such as this one) have been consolidated to create large

⁴ Home visits are only mandatory for Tier 2, 3 and 4 probationers who pose a high or very high risk of harm and, even then, only once in the duration of the Order or license period (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Beyond the requirements laid out in the National Standards, the participants in my study appeared to use

offices with correspondingly large geographical remits (Bottoms, 2008), patchwork⁵ is non-existent, stringent National Standards mean that every offender, at some point in their Order, will have to visit the probation office at least once a week for a period of time, and, increasingly long sentences have resulted in people being on ever-longer licences.

Bottoms (2008: 161) has described how the consolidation of probation offices has resulted in the probation service withdrawing from the community that it serves through the move to a 'smaller number of larger offices' whilst simultaneously endeavouring to make itself more visible through initiatives such as Community Payback. As more probationers are allocated to one office it allows for greater efficiency and economies of scale so that savings can be made in terms of staff and building resources. This is related to the rise of managerialism a model of working which underpinned the advent of NOMS and which has become increasingly pervasive in the service in general. Having considered that group interventions have been proven successful in reducing reoffending (cf. Raynor, 2004), Bottoms comes to the conclusion that 'if a consequence of that investment [in group programmes] is a more office-based probation service, so be it' (Bottoms, 2008: 162). However, Bottoms also argues that this consolidation means that officers rarely visit the areas in which offenders live and so 'office-based staff... are unlikely to inspire such confidence' in offenders of their ability to assist them in dealing with the issues they face (2008: 162). My research confirms that not only do officers

home visits primarily to increase compliance, rather than the more traditional aims of getting a broader picture of a client's life.

⁵ Whereby each officer is responsible for offenders in one particular area.

rarely visit the communities they serve, but that there is an element of fear in doing so. On one occasion an OM took her name badge off before going into a supermarket (saying that she did not want to risk drawing attention to herself) whilst another described how when he walked to an offender's house, he would not take any valuables with him and that he would memorise the route because looking at a map would make him feel vulnerable. The OMs in my study were clearly not well known in the community and appeared content remain anonymous – a far cry from the 1960s when the probation officer would be well known on their 'patch' (cf. St John, 1961). The programme of office consolidation has clearly resulted in probation becoming more removed from the communities it serves – the essence of Bottoms' argument.

The office is on a main road, served by numerous bus routes, in a densely populated, deprived area of the city. Many clients live nearby with others just a short bus ride away. However, some have to travel on more than one bus for almost an hour. Some walk because they don't have enough money to pay for the bus in the first place. The consolidation programme will undoubtedly have increased the distance some offenders will have to travel and this adds an additional burden to an offender depending on where they live. Durnescu (2011) has recently described how one of the 'pains of probation' is the distance offenders have to travel to their probation appointments. It was considered by Durnescu's participants to be 'more' painful by those who had to expend more time and money to comply with their probation order. This point is not a new one with Ashworth et al. pointing out that an activity that might be considered burdensome for one offence may not be so burdensome for another (1992: 24). There is a need, then, to take the location of a probation building into account when sentencing occurs within a

framework of proportionality because the ‘amount’ of punishment an offender receives will depend on their place of residence. The process of consolidation increases the level of punishment inflicted on certain people depending on where they live and so although the programme of office consolidation came about as result of managerialism it, perhaps unintentionally, increases the punitiveness of probation.

Conclusion

Through reference to fieldwork conducted in a probation office in England it has been shown that the physicality of the probation building reflects recent changes in probation policy as well as plays an integral part in shaping probation practice. OMs create and present a definition of probation to their clients which is inextricably linked to the ‘setting’ of a probation office and represents the rise of risk, punishment and managerialism over recent years. I have also highlighted how the confidential office allows OMs to speak freely about their clients but that this creates a frontstage and backstage of probation work; how technologies such as telephone conferencing are affected by the design of a building, and how the use of CCTV reflects the increased role of risk in the work of probation officers. Finally, the practice of office consolidation both separates staff from the communities they are supposed to be serving and increases the burden of probation resulting in an increased level of punishment for some.

I suggest, therefore, that by looking at how the architecture of probation affects those who use it, we can learn more about what probation is and what probation does. This kind of work, embedding practice in its physical surroundings, might also be useful if the policy of consolidation is reversed (as was suggested by one manager) and local,

smaller probation offices are reopened. If we take Gill's proposition in relation to prisons that the building must be the means by which an institution's aims are met (1962: 312) it becomes clear that, if we are witnessing a change in probation policy towards a 'rehabilitation revolution' (and this is a big 'if') we need to take a fresh look at probation offices with a view to making them more conducive to achieving these new aims of probation. If, for example, the importance of compliance over enforcement continues and policymakers come to the conclusion that improved compliance relies on the relationship between offender and officer, as suggested by Burnett and McNeill (2005), then to create a building which creates barriers and tension between the two will potentially militate against the impact of such a change in policy.

There will always be a need to provide protection for staff in addition to facilitating meaningful exchange between the officer and offender and this clearly presents an issue for policymakers. The probation service could look towards other organisations working with offenders in the community for some inspiration. For example, the 218 project in Glasgow places emphasis on staff and service users sharing spaces in areas which would normally be separate by having a 'policy of [staff] always eating their lunch with service users – sharing tables helps to diminish the divide between professionals and service users and encourages everyone to chat openly' (Thorp, 2006). Although there were reports of the building design creating different work cultures (Loucks et al., 2006: 3.17) such policies work to bridge the divide created by the architecture of a building, thus creating the potential for improved relationships between the officer and offender. Although OMs and offenders having lunch together is an unlikely prospect in the probation service, this is just one example of how the Service might start to think about

overcoming some of the problems imposed on staff and offenders by the buildings in which they work. The key message from this article, however, is that, as with prisons, it is imperative to consider the physical surroundings of probation work if we are to fully understand the way OMs work and if we are to embark on (another) period of whole-scale policy change.

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