

## **Just add water: prisons, therapeutic landscapes and healthy blue space**

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### **Abstract**

'Healthy prisons' is a well-established concept in criminology and prison studies. As a guiding principle to prisoners' quality of life, it goes back to the eighteenth century when prison reformer John Howard regarded the improvement of ventilation and hygiene as being essential in the quest for religious penitence and moral reform. In more recent times, the notion of the 'healthy prison' has been more commonly associated with that which is 'just' and 'decent', rather than what is healthy in a medical or therapeutic sense. This article interrogates the 'healthy prison' more literally. Drawing on data gathered from a UK prison located on a seashore, our aim is to explore prisoners' rational and visceral responses to water in a setting where the very nature of enforced residence can have negative effects on mental health. In expanding the possibilities for the theorisation of the health benefits that waterscapes may generate, and moving the discussion from healthy 'green space' to healthy 'blue space', the article reveals some of the less well-known and under-researched interconnections between therapeutic and carceral geographies, and criminological studies of imprisonment.

**Keywords** - 'Healthy prisons' water blue space wellbeing therapeutic landscapes architecture and design

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**Introducing the 'healthy' prison in geography and criminology**

While mindful of the risks associated with contributing to a discourse around 'healthy' prisons<sup>1</sup>, the concept has long been central to discussions about prison reform. One of the most influential scientists of the eighteenth century, Stephen Hales (1677-1761), pioneered technologies and methods based on the idea that buildings, like animals, need to breathe. His ideas influenced celebrated prison reformer and 'architects' mentor' John Howard (1726-1790), who, in a bid to eliminate contagious diseases among inmates decreed that prisons should not be cramped among other buildings, but should be in open country and close to running water. Shrewsbury prison, built in 1793 near to the River Severn, might be regarded as the first purposely 'healthy prison', according to Howard's vision of reform through purity and nature (Jewkes and Johnston, 2007). In more recent times, the 'healthy prison' has become established in prison policy and practice; for example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) employs 'healthy prison tests' as standards against which all prisons are independently inspected. For the Inspectorate, however, 'healthy prison' assessments are made on criteria of 'safety', 'respect', 'settlement' and 'purposeful activity', underpinned by notions of what is 'just' and 'decent', rather than by what is healthy in a medical, therapeutic or wellbeing sense.

Our concern in this article – which we view as an interdisciplinary contribution to prison scholarship that explores the synergies between health, carceral space, criminology and criminal justice – is to interrogate the notion of a 'healthy prison' as it pertains to wellbeing, quality of life and ontological security<sup>2</sup>. Theorising the prison as a potentially nurturing, rather than punitive, environment and one that might heal rather than harm, we focus attention on the extent to which new prison sites might benefit from being designed as contemporary forms of 'therapeutic landscape'. In this endeavour, we align our findings with those of geographers who have identified the importance of place in culturally attuned accounts of the experience of health, illness and well-being (Gesler, 1992; Williams, 2007), but we view this literature through the lens of socio-criminological studies of the prison. Moreover, while there is an emergent recognition within geographies, criminology and sociology of the benefits of therapeutic 'green spaces' in custodial settings (Jewkes and Moran, 2014; Wright, 2017; Moran and Turner, 2018), the main arguments of this article are concerned with an even more innovative focus in the prison context – 'blue space'.

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<sup>1</sup> The topic of 'good' prison design is fraught with political minefields but, as Jewkes (2018) argues, a focus on designing prison spaces that support rehabilitation could be a vital component in achieving radical justice reform including decarceration; thus our broad argument is not incompatible with abolitionist-leaning critical criminology (see, for example, Ryan and Sim, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> 'Ontological security' refers to a person's elemental sense of safety in the world, including a basic trust of others. It is an essential ingredient of human existence, and is necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being. The term originates from the work of Laing (1960) who argues that mental illness derives from the lack of such security.

The article draws on empirical data from a broader, three-year ESRC-funded comparative (UK and Scandinavia) study investigating: how penal aims and philosophies are expressed in the design of new prisons; and the role of prison architecture, design and technology in the lived experience of imprisonment<sup>3</sup>. During a six-week period of fieldwork at the prison under discussion in this article, data collection included: ethnographic observations; 29 focus groups (of between two and six prisoners, with 75 participants in total); and interviews with 36 members of uniformed and civilian staff and 42 prisoners. The mixed-methods approach enabled collective experiences to be heard in the focus groups, alongside the more personal and individual accounts generated through interviews, and for both to be supplemented by ethnographic observations of interior and exterior spaces and of the views that these environments afforded of the blue space beyond the prison boundary. An anonymous paper-based survey was also distributed (n = 85, response rate 22.6%). Although landscape was anticipated to be regarded by participants as a key element of the custodial environment, and all interviews covered the inclusion, experience and significance of green spaces, the significance of blue space was initially not predicted within the wider project but was spontaneously raised by participants in response to questions about their experience of the prison and their contact (or lack thereof) with nature. Audio recordings were transcribed and analysed with NVivo, using an inductive coding method which sought to identify respondents' descriptions of blue spaces and their significance.

What follows considers both the potentially 'healing' properties of water in prisons (healing, that is, in the sense of enhancing wellbeing and restoring ontology), and the extent to which the prison *disrupts* conventional understandings of therapeutic landscapes, with water in critical criminological accounts engendering negative associations of punishment and control, rather than the beneficial experiences commonly emphasised in geography and health studies.

### **'Healing' prisons and therapeutic carceral landscapes**

The concept of therapeutic landscapes was introduced by cultural geographer Wilbert Gesler (1992) and has subsequently been explored extensively within studies of environment, health and care (e.g. Gesler 1996, 1998; Kearns and Gesler 1998; Williams 2007; Butterfield and Martin, 2016). But, while

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<sup>3</sup> ESRC Standard Grant ES/K011081/1: 01 Jan 2014 - 30 June 2017, "Fear-suffused environments" or potential to rehabilitate? Prison architecture, design and technology and the lived experience of carceral spaces'. We draw here on data generated at a prison in the UK, for adult male offenders and adult and young offender females.

traditional landscape studies have focused on 'green' space, emphasising the healing potential of nature (and elsewhere we have drawn on this literature to suggest that there are potentially significant health and wellbeing benefits to planting trees and flowerbeds in prison grounds; see Jewkes and Moran, 2015; Moran and Turner, 2018), studies in geography have recently started to explore the impact of 'blue' vistas. Although acknowledging that water comes in 'myriad shades and forms (grey, brown, dark, oily, muddy, clear)', Foley and Kistemann coined the all-encompassing term 'healthy blue space' in reference to 'its established associations with oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and other bodies of water' (2015: 158). Water has, then, long been imbued with health-giving, as well as aesthetically pleasing, properties. From Roman spas and thermal springs to Victorian lidos and the contemporary vogue for natural pools and open-water swimming, water is associated with a wealth of physical and psychological therapeutic benefits, including the prolonging of life.

Proximity to water even underpins social status and social mobility. Luttik's (2000) Netherlands-based study found that houses with views of water commanded an 8 to 12 per cent price premium, while Lange and Schaeffer (2001) found that hotel guests in Switzerland were willing to pay 10 per cent more for 'lake view' rooms, rather than forest views. The cultural capital of water has been further highlighted by the billions of pounds of public funding and private investment that has been put into the restoration of Britain's canal network and the building of commercial and residential waterside developments over the last two decades, leading one newspaper editorial to observe that 'water is proving the vital ingredient to kick-start regeneration in old industrial areas once considered past the point of no return' (Hetherington, 2006). Little wonder, then, that watery locations 'have wide cultural and emotional resonance' (Foley 2015: 218).

So, if water is widely understood to be 'rehabilitative' – in the sense of recovery and growth, of both people and environments – it is somewhat surprising that these properties have not been more widely utilised in planning decisions about new custodial facilities. In the prison context, we may extrapolate two interesting questions from the discussion so far. First, can contemporary prisons ever be described as 'healthy' in the sense that geographers use the term? And, secondly, could the incorporation of 'blue space' in prison landscapes aid prisoners' sense of wellbeing, perhaps even assisting with the journey towards 'rehabilitation' in the sense of resettlement and desistance from crime?

To begin to answer these questions, it is instructive to consider the lessons that prison architects might learn (and, indeed, in some jurisdictions, are learning) from the therapeutic landscapes

that have been incorporated in other institutional settings for over two decades (Jewkes, 2018). Of course, it might justifiably be argued that health-promoting environments are a more obvious component of the design of hospitals, forensic mental health units, holistic therapy centres or drug rehabilitation units, and an easier 'sell' when thinking about public acceptability. Most discernibly, these other institutions have an explicit 'healing' function; and usually one that encompasses 'wellbeing' in addition to relief from physical symptoms, illness or trauma. To take one notable example, Maggie's Cancer Care Centres – a growing network of non-clinical healthcare environments providing support for cancer patients and their families – are underpinned by the Enlightenment tradition that design of the environment can do more for health and wellbeing than the medical profession is able to (Jencks, 2015). The centres are not only architecturally striking (indeed, many are breathtakingly beautiful), but they are linked by design described by their co-founder as an 'architecture of hope' (ibid). Intended to be a 'balm for the senses' (Rose, 2018), 'Maggie's', as they are universally known, are defined by inarguably positive qualities, including light, space, connectedness to nature and, in many cases, either located on water (e.g. the Maggie's Centres in Dundee, Forth Valley and Hong Kong) or with stunning water features as integral parts of their 'healing landscapes' (e.g. Cheltenham, Manchester).

The parallels with prison space, which typically prioritises security, control and order over health, healing and hope, may not be immediately obvious. However, as the notion of 'trauma-informed' design begins to penetrate discussions of the design of new women's prisons in all jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland (Jewkes, 2018), the design philosophies underpinning Maggie's Centres are proving undeniably seductive to some prison architects. Like 'Maggie's', the new, planned women's prisons in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are intended by their designers to be 'therapeutic' in a holistic sense, as well as in specific relation to (mental) health. Their architects have made concerted efforts to normalise the prison environment, to provide the spatial settings that nurture richness and meaning, and to harness the potentially civilising, rehabilitative role of penal aesthetics in the belief that the beneficent effects of beauty have long been the hallmark of civilisation (Jewkes, 2012, 2018). In most cases, this renewed understanding of the relationship between nature and health has resulted in the 'greening' of carceral spaces and, while those who commission and advise on the design of new prisons in England and Wales remain conservative in the face of imagined security threats posed by greenery<sup>4</sup> (Moran and Turner, 2018), older prisons frequently have mature gardens, horticulture, wildflower meadows, and land that is given over to bees, chickens and

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<sup>4</sup> Among the fears are that prisoners will climb trees, hide contraband in trees and shrubbery, and that mature trees will interrupt sightlines, disrupting surveillance opportunities.

goats. In some cases, this has extended to the incorporation of water in the landscape and it is now common to find prisoner-built ponds, often with fish or aquatic birds in residence.

The relationship between water and carceral space can be problematic, however, with five key points to note. First, the presence of water near a prison historically has been by happenstance: a matter of expedience (particularly in the nineteenth century, with prisoners used as a source of labour to build harbours); security practicalities (water being a barrier to escape); or coincidence (if a state-owned plot in a coastal area is deemed suitable as a prison site). In these respects, we may question whether the relationship between building and water meets the criteria of a healthy blue space, in that the waterscape may not be considered to be 'at the centre' of the landscape (Foley and Kistemann 2015: 157); i.e. the prison is highly unlikely to have been located next to a water body for its intended therapeutic effects.

Second, even where water appears to be part of a progressive regime aimed at improving prospects of rehabilitation, it can have unintended consequences. For example, Bastøy, Norway's famous 'eco-prison', is located approximately four kilometres from the Norwegian mainland and visitors to the prison must take a ferry, which travels across the fjord and back once a day. Superficially, Bastøy might seem like an idyll where prisoners can fish from the banks, swim in the water and earn a certificate in maritime proficiency by operating the daily ferry. But the island's water-boundness reinforces many of the negative cultural associations of prison islands, and the bittersweet juxtaposition of (relative) 'freedom' and restriction of liberty brings its own insidious 'pains' (Hancock and Jewkes 2011) to the extent that some prisoners simply cannot cope and request a transfer to harsher prison conditions on the mainland (Shammas 2014).

Third, and relatedly, prison islands historically have not had such a benign image as Bastøy. At Alcatraz, Robben Island and many others (including even Bastøy in its former guise as a facility for delinquent boys), the sea has been regarded by prison authorities as an effective deterrent to escape, especially when the waters are shark-infested (Turner et al, 2019). Moreover, in the broader authoritarian pursuit of order and compliance, water has negative connotations. It is used to control populations via the regulation of behaviour and spatial activities – water cannons, 'misting', drip water torture and waterboarding (the latter being a controversial interrogation technique used most notoriously at another coastal prison at Guantanamo Bay US military naval base in Cuba), all serving as examples.

Fourth, beyond these extremes, in standard prison environments control is habitually exerted using water and water infrastructures. In the example given earlier – of ponds within prison landscapes – access to these blue spaces is often restricted to prisoners on ‘enhanced’ regimes, or who are part of a ‘trusted prisoner’ grounds maintenance team<sup>5</sup>. Perversely, then, the most damaged or vulnerable individuals in prison may not be permitted access to the natural resources that they would have most to gain from. And, as we shall see in the discussion below, even an expansive seascape may hypothetically be utilised as a form of ‘soft power’ in prisons (Crewe, 2011), restricted to a small number of inmates who earn its privilege through compliant behaviour. In a different example of control via water, prison security personnel have decreed that in-cell sanitation poses the risk of an individual flooding their cell or causing bodily harm to themselves or others; a risk averted by providing showers rather than baths, and restricting the flow of taps and showerheads. Our research found that these regulations cause significant frustration as well as concerns for personal hygiene among prisoners.

Finally, therapeutic literature frequently focuses on the necessity of bodily immersion for therapeutic effect, arguing that benefits of seascape generally accrue to individuals viewing a blue space which they can also access physically. In the vast majority of prisons, full immersion in water is not possible<sup>6</sup>. Yet, even the sight of nature has been shown to reduce stress for prisoners. Echoing studies of hospital patients which have found greatly enhanced recovery rates among patients with access to a view of nature (see Moran and Turner, 2018, for an overview), Moore (1981) found that prisoners who were only able to view the prison courtyard from their cells were 24 per cent more likely to make sick-call visits than inmates who had a view of surrounding farmland.

Taking a lead from Moore, we interrogate the significance of a sea view in the context of therapeutic landscape, health and wellbeing. Although our scope of enquiry was broad, encompassing all aspects of the commissioning, planning, design and subsequent lived experience of the prison, the presence-and-absence of the sea was a salient feature of many discussions in this particular prison facility, and revealed much about existential issues surrounding identity, escapism, memory, happiness, resistance and loss, as will be evident in the interview and focus group excerpts that follow.

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<sup>5</sup> On a recent visit to a prison in England one of the authors was shown an area given over to gardens and horticulture, which included a pond with ducks. However, it was outside a ‘mini-perimeter’ and accessible only to a handful of prisoners. On the adjacent, ‘inner’ side was a concrete yard, which was the only outdoor space to which most prisoners were permitted. Invited to feed back impressions of the site, it seemed an obvious point to convey that these beautiful green and blue spaces were precious resources that were being under-utilised, not least because even the ducks and other birds looked ‘imprisoned’ and as if they were craving human company.

<sup>6</sup> Although there have been swimming pools at some prisons in England and Wales, including HMPs Holloway and Bullwood Hall, both captured in the photography of Valentine Schmidt <http://valentineschmidt.com/about.html>

## Seascapes and escapism

A prison cell with a sea view came as something of a surprise to most of our prisoner respondents. Although 75% had been in custody previously (with an average of eight previous sentences), the fact that the prison was newly-built meant that half had never been incarcerated there before, so its proximity to the sea was unexpected and was frequently used as a point of comparison to other prisons. Tony's exuberant language clearly expresses his surprise:

See when you were upstairs you can just see the water and all the boats and that ... Seeing like folk on speedboats like racing and that. Holy shit!

Participants were keen to draw such comparisons. In this example from a focus group with adult male prisoners, their language conveyed their excitement at discovering the view of marine life:

Interviewer: Does the view out of the window make a difference?

Harry: Oh, big difference, please believe it. I've been in a while and I'm used to seeing just concrete walls round us or a fence round us.

Damien: People like you, you lifers [referring to another member of the group], you could do with a better view couldn't you, to be honest?

Harry: Oh definitely...

Damien: Like people like us who are doing fours, fives [years], it's not really a big difference ...

Harry: I've been in nine [years] just now. And as you don't get out this is the first I've ever seen a view like this. ...But this is fucking crazy!

Terry: See the town, the harbour, the boats ...

Harry: ...it's great. I've seen the dolphins, I've seen the whales out at sea.

Terry: It does make a difference doesn't it? It makes it a bit better [you know].

Harry: Oh a big difference.



Sean: There's not many jails you can see that, you've seen dolphins, whales from your cell window.

Harry: It's brilliant man, know what I mean. I stand looking out watching dolphins.

Sean: It was last week we were watching the dolphins. Last week we were watching the dolphins!

As well as recounting particularly notable occasions, most participants generated positive associations with the sea view, using words descriptive of a therapeutic effect, including feelings of happiness, comfort, ease, tranquillity, relaxation, stress-reduction, restfulness and peace. Recalling the top-floor cell he had been in previously, Tom said:

I could see for miles out to the sea...it was cracking 'cause in the winter you could see the rigs sometimes all lit up away in the distance. You knew it was rigs 'cause it was lights away in the middle and you know it's the North Sea.

The sound, smells and, especially, sight of the sea were instrumental in relieving the psychological compression endured in conditions of confinement (Sykes, 1958) and many prisoners commented on how it facilitated 'escape' from the monotony of prison life. As Mikey explains:

A view's a good thing. It makes your time go by. I notice myself just sitting watching stuff outside and an hour or two's gone by. Whereas if you're just looking at your wall downstairs, even just looking out at the main walls, it does your nut in.

Gary, who described his cell as 'probably three quarters off the prime spot' (i.e. not with the very best views, but good nonetheless) said:

The views are brilliant. When I look out of my cell window, there is a kestrel that hangs about and you see it in action. My cell window looks out facing this way. I can see that island that we call

Scary Rock...And at the gable-end you see the ocean and part of the harbour. In the cells over this side, you can see the harbour and a bit of the town. The views are brilliant.

Jimmy underlined the potentially therapeutic effects of the sea view:

...if I came in at the start of my sentence and having that view it would help me not think of depression and despair and things like that because you're seeing outside. Especially on a stormy night with the sea and things like that.

Prisoners explained that being able to see the sea at night had a soporific effect ('Gives me a little bit of sleep, seeing the sea'), or said that if they were able to move to a cell with a window that overlooked such a view it would provide that benefit. Others reflected on the feelings of relaxation and peace derived from the ability to visually interact with the weather or sunsets, augmented by the elemental characteristics of the water, such as the smells and sounds of the sea. Scott said:

I love looking at the sea. I never used to like the sea, it was until I went out there and you see some of the sunsets it is just gorgeous like and even with the thunder and lightning, I liked that as well, but everyone has different... I think when you start getting older you're not young and dumb anymore. I love the sea it's so peaceful like, it's the best thing you can do with the sea, like the fishing boats sailing along the side of us.

Of course, there are numerous experiences available in custody that may eliminate the tensions of prison life and erode the 'totality' of the 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961). Metaphorical escape shapes both illegitimate behaviours (sex, drugs, use of banned mobile phones etc.) and legitimate activities that are explicitly designed to allow prisoners to 'tune out' of the prison culture (in-cell television, arts and music projects, gardening and horticulture and prison chapels and multi-faith centres, to name but a few). In our research, the sea view was perceived by prisoners and staff alike as a justifiable 'escape', allowing those prisoners who were privy to it to feel removed from the mental or bodily pains of imprisonment without compromising their physical security within carceral space:

Damien: I can spend ages looking out the window and drifting away...it's made my time a lot better. Especially for long term prisoners, people that have got a large majority of their life stuck in here, little things like that that don't cost anything do make a difference. It helps the time become a bit more bearable, to be honest.

Interviewer: What's good about looking at the harbour? How does it make you feel to do that?

Stephen: Sort of tranquil. You can gather your thoughts and just think about what you're going to do when you get outside again. It's good to see some civilisation.

Staff members also talked of both prisoners and officers 'just daydreaming' while standing at the floor-to-ceiling windows in each living unit, which were eloquently likened by one prison officer to 'infinity swimming pools', such was the way the sea view appeared at the end of the corridor.

### **The sea as absent-yet-present**

A sea view is not enjoyed in every area of the prison, however. In fact, you can spend a great deal of time moving around the facility and have no idea of its seaside location. And yet, it is a conspicuous sensory and imagined presence, even when unviewable. It was the negative, undesirable aspects of being within close proximity to the sea, that were uppermost in some prisoners' minds. Complaints included the pestilent, raucous seabirds ('What I don't like is the seagulls...they're too bloody noisy'), unpleasant smells of seaweed and sewage effluent transported on the prevailing winds ('it stinks'), and even the wind itself ('If it's high winds the windows blow shut, or sometimes they blow open').

Nonetheless, a cell with a sea view was coveted by many. Scott explained that unless you are located in the upper storeys of the houseblock, your cell window looks out only onto the exterior perimeter or internal spaces such as the exercise yard or sports pitch:

Interviewer: What view have you got on the ground floor?

Scott: The fence, you can't really see much because it's closed off, but I've been upstairs and it's a beautiful view if you're [...] on the left-hand side because you've got the harbour, you've got the ships coming in. A lot of people will sit there and just watch the ships coming in and going out.

Reflecting further on the limited views offered in ground floor rooms, Ali recalled memories of a famous English landmark in suggesting improvement to the prison:

You can't see past the wall. To me, you could have... say if you're in the Blackpool Tower, I don't know if you've ever been in the Blackpool Tower, you can walk along one part of the section. There's like the four corners, and then one piece of pure glass ...And I'm thinking why can't you have a big section of that wall that's glass in that sense? But then again, if that's like the sea, that could be the seaside. Or maybe not the sea, you could maybe look through there to that part, and maybe see a boat. It'd be like a picture. [I'd be] coming alive, looking at it.

Given that the design of this prison was borrowed from another, pre-existing, recently-built but land-locked facility in the same jurisdiction, it was somewhat surprising to learn during our fieldwork that the newer facility in which we were conducting our study was known as the 'cut price' or 'pauper's' version of the other prison, because many of the original design features – including glazed walls that here would have permitted more sea views – had been 'filled in' with bricks and other 'hard' construction materials (as one prisoner said, from the outside the prison looked nice, 'but inside? Nothing but concrete'). The reasons cited by senior management and the prison's designers were cost (toughened glass of robust enough quality to constitute no security risk being predictably expensive) or a combination of cost and the pragmatics of being a mixed-gender facility and therefore required to be 'double engineered' (as one manager put it), with two 'versions' of some areas (e.g. prisoners' reception spaces) and a degree of separation between the sexes required.

The alternative explanation given by many prisoners and prison staff for the relatively closed-in feel of the facility was the weather, which one Scottish prisoner described as 'dreichy' (that is, wet, cold and gloomy). The fact that numerous officers we spoke to pointed to the tree saplings blown horizontal in the squall coming off the North Sea, or indicated that the view from the windows was frequently of

an enclosed space or the wall of another building (rather than a more expansive horizon that would be open to the elements) was evidence of what was commonly described as the 'brutal' climate. Indeed, so ubiquitous was the largely unseen sea that a senior manager identified it as a security risk, because the CCTV cameras get obscured by sea spray, and metal doors and locks are corroded by salt residues.

Nonetheless, it was hard not to feel that the seascape on its doorstep was a missed opportunity, given how rarely it could be seen from within the prison walls – especially as the decision had been made early on in the planning process that windows in the male part of the prison would have horizontal bars, allowing for a better view, and in the female part, cell windows would have no bars at all<sup>7</sup>. Richie, a prisoner in one of the prized top-floor cells, described his appreciation of the horizontal bars when the annual local festival had taken place in the harbour a week earlier:

There's been quite a lot happening outside. I think it was Friday we got a firework display. That was good. I had a decent view of it. The high ones, blue ones, heard all the bangs; I thought it was a terrorist attack to start with, before we realised it was fireworks... I'm facing the harbour, so...that was a half hour's entertainment... I would take my little boy to see something like that. I was glad that the bars were horizontal. I think it made a difference...On the Saturday night there was a Red Bull air stunts team. Well, it was maybe not Red Bull, but it was fixed wing planes, they were doing stunts. That was good, another half hour's entertainment.

Richie also expressed sympathy for those prisoners on the 'wrong' side of the building who could not see the firework display, but could hear it. A prison officer working in the residential unit underlined the value attached to the top floor accommodation that was on the 'right' side of the prison:

Certain cells are quite popular...you'd get the ones in the top flat requesting the ones that were facing the sea because they'd have the breeze coming in from the sea, plus the view out...So a view is quite important to a lot of cons.

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<sup>7</sup> Discussions among high-level stakeholders about what was appropriate for men or women in custody is frequently crystallised in opinions about bars on windows. While many senior HMPPS staff in England and Wales felt that there should be no distinction between male and female cells, we were witness to several conversations among Ministry of Justice personnel where it was opined that horizontal bars were acceptable for women and young people in custody, but adult, male prisons should have vertical bars on cell windows to signify 'punishment'. Prisoners themselves expressed conflicting views, with some saying that it was unfair that the women's part of the prison had fully glazed windows when the men's cells had barred glass, and others expressing the view that it was right that there were bars on windows and that the women should have them too ('We're in prison, we're here to be punished').

For some of those who did not have a visible outlook to the coast, the presence-yet-absence of the sea seemed to weigh heavily. Visual and cultural geographies tell us that absences are not simply 'things missing'; they are what was there and now is not any longer, or what should be there and yet is not (Adami, 2015). Preserving that which might disappear from the memory was a challenge that one of our interviewees had prepared for. Before entering the prison, Kevin had tried, as it were, to bottle the memory of the land- and sea-scape. He spoke of how, as he passed through the reception gates, he paused to take in the scenery around him – the 'buildings, the green grass and the sea' – knowing that he was about to lose these views along with his freedom. He had been anticipating a prison sentence, and had mentally prepared himself, including by making the most of a sea view while at liberty:

even the point leading up...you know, half a year before, because this has been going on for a while, I did a lot of things outside before I came here. I saw a sunset every night. Where I live you can see the coastline very easily, so every night if it was a nice night I'd go and watch the sunset. I thought I'd get as many in as I could, because once I was in here, I'm not going to see a sunset at the sea.

In Kevin's case, at least, the knowledge that the sea was close by – a visible absence but physical presence – appeared to bring him some solace. As Dafydd Jones et al (2012) observe, absence-and-presence is evoked through a range of social and spatial practices, and one of Kevin's ways of memorising, and memorialising, the seascape was to keep a painting of it in his cell bathroom: 'a little painting, I did it, a picture of a sea, and relaxing landscape. So when I get stressed I just think I'm somewhere nice'.

Den, on the other hand, emphasised that you could 'feel' the sea's presence even in the enclosed outdoor spaces:

It is nice to get out [in the prison grounds], you are out, you are actually outside in an open space. I sort of imagine walking down the coastline again...you can smell the sea breeze on the

days, or you can smell the sewage or whatever it is, washing up depending on which way the wind is blowing, yes, it is just nice being outside.

Many participants in interviews talked about the sea, even though they were not able to view it from their cells. Some visited other prisoners who did have coastal views, causing them to reflect that it was not simply a matter of having a pleasant outlook, being able to participate in a small way in local cultural celebrations, or even contributing to a sense of health and wellbeing, but that a sea view might be ontologically beneficial, especially for those serving long sentences:

If I knew I was going to be here for over a year I'd have took the opportunity for one of the cells that had a sea view because I've sat in one of my pal's cells and you see the boats and that coming in. And I haven't seen the sea since 1994, so when I seen the sea and seen boats coming in. Well, one guy said "look at the smirk on his face". You know? It was just... my eyes were just taking it in. It was nice ... I can move just now if I wish it. But the same again, I'm going to be here for hopefully just a year, so I'd rather somebody else gets that cell if they're doing a big, big sentence because it would be better for them (John).

For Leslie, who had previously had a view to the working harbour, the to-ings and fro-ings provided a soothingly predictable, temporal rhythm to his day:

When I was in last year I was on that top floor and you could see right to the harbour and that and you used to be able to see lobster trucks or crab trucks or whatever it was, I used to enjoy that. Just knew when he was doing it, what time he was doing it, and just sat back and watched.

Now, Leslie had a different, but still scenic view from his cell:

I can see the houses on the top of the mountain that's over there. I can see the houses and that and a light house. Not too bad, better than what a lot of people have got.

In general, though, it was the expansive seascape, the never-ending horizons and the vivid sunsets that were deemed most desirable by the majority of prisoners who expressed a preference.

Nonetheless, as with many experiential elements of imprisonment, there was not a consensus on the benefits of a sea view for health and wellbeing. For some prisoners, the sea view was regarded as negative, even detrimental to their lived experience of incarceration, disturbing their ontology and exacerbating the pains of imprisonment, as the following section will discuss.

### **Memory, pain, indifference, resistance**

Studies of therapeutic landscapes in geography are mindful that place is experienced differently by different individuals and therefore may deliver different outcomes to those anticipated (Conradson 2005). Criminologists, meanwhile, remind us that the pains of imprisonment may be exacerbated by minimal, restricted and controlled experience of the deprivations that confinement inflicts, because limited exposure to the elements that contribute to ontological security simply reinforce the prisoner's exile from the outside world and may evoke painful memories of happier times (Jewkes, 2002; Laws, 2018). These ambiguities were borne out by our research findings, which underlined that while for many prisoners a sea view was highly prized, for others, the waterscape was far from therapeutic or restorative. For some, it was simply 'there'; a largely unseen backdrop to a monotonous life in confinement. For example, Scott spoke of his apathy towards the harbour:

I'm not really too interested in seeing ships moving back and forth or watching people picking up their crab boxes.

Such sentiments may reflect what geographers have termed the 'extinction of experience' (Soga and Gaston, 2016; Moran and Turner, 2018), in which physical separation from nature results in an inability to recognise any beneficial effect from it, and eventually, a general apathy towards the natural environment as a whole (Moran and Turner, 2018). But, in this case, it was not necessarily being incarcerated that caused people to feel somewhat detached from the seascape. The prison held many individuals from the immediate surrounding area and, for them, the sea was not a novelty; it was part of their biographies and that of their families and forebears. For those who worked 'offshore' before entering prison, it was a source of work and was vital to the local economy, but was none the less banal for that. As Schept elegantly puts it, the 'visual register of prisons and other carceral formations in the landscape is stitched to a regime of knowledge and a discourse that naturalizes their place' (2014: 218),



culturally, geographically and politico-economically. For many of the people we interviewed, the sea was so stitched into their life experiences that they simply took it for granted.

However, others juxtaposed the constantly mobile landscape of the working port with their own feelings of stasis. Here, Duane makes a critical link between the seascape and his memories of life prior to prison:

I can see the compensators for the gates at the harbour ...But now and again looking out the window does your head in. Because I can see our compensators and the cranes, so that reminds me of the oil rigs. So, then it puts my head back to where I've come from and where I am now.

For many prisoners, blue space as memorial landscape, was a source of frustration. When talking about the proximity of the sea, Melody was initially positive, but was adamant that it would have detrimental effects over the longer term. From her cell, she was only able to see the perimeter wall, internal fences and a small portion of the garden area designated for use by female prisoners. She recalled an occasion where she visited another prisoner's cell:

...I went upstairs last week to speak to a friend of mine, [name], who got out yesterday, and what a view you had from her room! You can actually see the whole harbour and see some of the town. It was pretty, it was nice, but I wouldn't like to look at that all the time, I think it would drive me nuts. Because you can see daily life going on out there. I prefer the regime, I think. ... It's nice to look at, but I would just want to be out there all the time. It would drive me crazy.

Melody went on to recall her feelings when the aforementioned local festival was held close by. As well as events on land, power-boats and acrobatic planes circled the harbour. Although she did not have a direct view, the sounds of the water sports carried into the prison. She explained:

Last week they had some boat ride or something, some fair, and it was like next to the window. And that was at eight o'clock, and as soon as I opened the window and looked out, all my heart

was melting away, I just felt like my heart was racing, I had to pull the blind down. It was just too much. I had to lie there. It was like I shot it down, just pulled down the curtain...

These sentiments are reminiscent of the prisoners held at Alcatraz, the island prison in San Francisco. There is a well-known, perhaps apocryphal, story that the least popular cell there was the one at the end of the facility from which holiday-makers could be seen and heard enjoying themselves on the beach across the bay and where, on New Year's Eve, prisoners reported hearing the tinkling of champagne glasses and laughter carried across the water by sea breezes (Jarvis 2004). The sounds of others' enjoyment was simply too painful to bear and only exacerbated inmates' sense of enforced isolation (Turner, Moran and Jewkes, 2019).

For other prisoners again, rejecting the sea view appeared to be a small act of resistance. Many were unable to articulate this defiance beyond 'can't be bothered', 'it doesn't bother me', or 'it's not going to make much of a difference, you're still in prison', although Shaun dismissed the views of 'the sea and the big ships sailing' as being for 'old people' and 'a bit shite, to be honest'. Several mentioned that having a television was more important than a view, while others noted that, even when passing the long windows with a view to the sea on their way to work, education or to the gym, many prisoners took the opportunity to gaze at their own image in the glass (the only opportunity to see their full-length reflection, as the mirrors in cell bathrooms were very small), rather than at the natural world beyond the prison.

One might imagine that the relatively limited number of cells with coastal views could become an informal and locally-applied version of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEPs) scheme, whereby prisoners are incentivised to exhibit good behaviour through offers to move to cells with a sea view, or down-graded to units without such a view if they fail to comply. Potential use of a sea view as 'reward' is not restricted to the prison, after all. In Lange and Schaeffer's (2001) aforementioned study of 'the market value of a room with a view', they not only found that hotel rooms with views of water are more expensive than those with views of forests or architecturally interesting townscapes, but that hotels rewarded repeat customers and favoured clientele by giving them priority access to the rooms with the most desirable views.

In our research, both staff members and prisoners spoke of how the top-floor cells with a sea view could be utilised by prison staff in the exercise of 'soft power' (Crewe, 2011); that is, used to responsabilise and incentivise prisoners because they had the best atmosphere, outlook and 'ambiance'. But we found little evidence that this happened in practice and, on the whole staff, as well as prisoners,

lamented the relative paucity of visible waterscapes. For example, one non-custodial staff member spoke for many when he suggested that it was simply 'bizarre' that the whole prison wasn't facing the water as he couldn't see 'any negative aspect of prisoners...looking at the sea'. Another uniformed officer said:

As yourself, you go on holiday, if you get a choice, say you go away to Spain or wherever, and they say to you in the hotel "what would you like to face?" ...You'd pick the sea, of course you would. Every time. So, I think prisoners are like that.

### **Blue space, escape and escapism: some concluding thoughts about prisons with a sea view**

Analyses of prisoners' engagement with water are rare, other than in studies of torture, and in this article, we have attempted a more holistic exploration of prisoners' interactions, positive and negative, with blue space, by focusing on their relationship to a seascape visible from only a few areas of the prison in which they were held. By synthesising perspectives from health geographies and criminological studies of imprisonment, we hope to have highlighted the importance of prison siting and external views to the wellbeing of prisoners. 'Therapeutic landscapes' are rarely discussed among those who commission and design new prisons, despite the near-ubiquity in their deliberations of seemingly related ideas including 'normalisation', 'trauma-informed care and practice' and 'enabling environments'.

Perhaps it is simply that therapy and security appear to be mutually exclusive goals. Somewhat paradoxically for this discussion, 'escape' is, in a metaphorical sense, a central criterion of a therapeutic environment. Yet, at the same time, preventing escape is a prison's 'most fundamental challenge' (Martin and Chantraine, 2018: 1). While it might be assumed that the two – literal and metaphorical escape – are not comparable, many escapist activities in prison (perhaps most obviously exemplified by access to the Internet which transports the user to a 'generalised elsewhere' of distant places; Morley and Robins, 1995: 132), attract criticism among those who believe that incarceration should be a time of isolation, physical restriction, material hardship and suffering (Jewkes and Reisdorf, 2016). For such critics (and in a manner not dissimilar to internet-enabled technologies, whereby the WWW has long been alternatively framed as the 'Wild, Wild West'), giving prison inmates sight of a seascape, in all its wild, expansive ruggedness, arguably poses a similar epistemological threat to the physicality of the

prison environment and experience. On the one hand, a view of the sea can expand horizons (again, literally and metaphorically) and enable people in conditions of coerced confinement to manage otherwise unmanageable anxieties. But the fact that 'escapism' involves the 'unbordering' of the tightly policed and defined margins of prison space, challenging (in a Foucauldian sense) the regulation, control and fixity of the prisoner body and mind, would be problematic for some of the high-level, security-minded and risk-obsessed stakeholders who make key planning and design decisions about new prison facilities, even if they would not express their fears in quite this way.

We know this to be the case because, one of the 'impacts' arising from the ESRC-funded study from which the data utilised here are drawn, is that we are frequently invited to advise prison commissioners, planners, architects and landscape designers on 'best practice' in carceral design and, in particular, on elements of prison architecture and design that might help to deliver rehabilitation. Prison siting rarely features in these conversations, as new prisons still tend to be located on land that is either government property or is a derelict former industrial site. But, even if external advice about prison location was sought by commissioning and planning stakeholders, our research reminds us, in the multiplicities of encounter with the seascape reported by prisoners in this single-site prison, of the fallacy of applying a checklist of design features that could be applied in different prisons with predictable results. As Gesler et al. argue (2004), and Butterfield and Martin (2016) reiterate in relation to Maggie's Centres, such an approach can guide the physical design of particular sites, but cannot anticipate individual, social and symbolic qualities of place.

In conclusion, then, we hope to have demonstrated some of the potential therapeutic benefits of a sea view. It would be a stretch to say that our findings support the proposition that by being rehabilitative, in the sense of healing, wellbeing and growth, blue spaces can also be rehabilitative in the sense of resettlement and desistance from crime. However, many prisoners said they felt calmer, were better able to sleep or were simply mesmerised by the seascape visible from their window, all of which may have had positive impacts on their sense of self and future outlook. Conversely, as we have also illustrated, the sea can bring with it unwelcome physical and sensory intrusions and negative connotations associated with memory and loss, suggesting that proximity to blue space is at best ambiguous for incarcerated individuals.

In putting forward this argument, we have responded to Foley and Kistemann's call to 'extend the scope spatially, methodologically and in inter-disciplinary ways as part of a broader hydro-social set of therapeutic geographies' (2015: 157) but, by viewing the topic through the additional lens of socio-

criminological studies of the prison, we have questioned whether the concept of 'healthy blue space' can be wholeheartedly adopted. We suggest that, at the very least, the notion should be interrogated and problematised under contingent circumstances where lack of agency in relation to blue space may neutralise its more obvious, positive advantages. Our research demonstrated that, something which at first glance appears to be a 'common sense' benefit of being in a seaside prison – visual interaction with blue space – is in fact 'a product of the human mind and of material circumstances' (Gesler, 1992, p.743), manifest in wider embodied and identity-related interactions. Put simply, although visual interaction with seascapes can have therapeutic effects and engender feelings of freedom, it may also have the opposite effect, reinforcing insidious aspects of carceral control.

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