

Collin Gittins

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Introduction

Does hostile architecture discriminate against the homeless population and if so what actions are being taken against it?

There are multiple reasons why I've become interested in this topic. I first started to see hostile architecture on social media where I saw a train grate that had extruding curves coming out of it making it uncomfortable to sleep or sit on. After learning of this it enlightened me to take notice of my surroundings. I started to see more and more of this type of architecture in my area which made me want to research the subject. I was curious about both the designs and the intended use for the architecture. I wanted to know why this type of architecture exists if it seems like it's only hurting people rather than something beneficial. Additionally I want to know the history behind this subject. Where did it first begin? What is the public's view on this type of deterrent? In conclusion I wanted to know if there were any positive effects on the homeless crisis. I was curious to see if this architecture could be labeled as discrimination since it mostly affects a certain group of people to my knowledge. I also wanted to know the reason behind implementing architecture like this and if it is effective in its intended use. I'm also interested to find out where hostile architecture is most prevalent as well as who decides to construct this type of architecture and why.

While conducting my research for this subject I expect to find a multitude of things. For example I believe I will find different types of defensive architecture as well as the people who made the decisions to use this type of architecture. Also, I suspect that I will find the cause and effect of these constructions on society and which group of people it mostly affects. Lastly I conclude that I will find actions being taken against this subject and general opinions about it.

Source Entries

Citation#1

De Fine Licht, Karl Persson. "Hostile Urban Architecture: A Critical Discussion of the Seemingly Offensive Art of Keeping People Away." *Etikk i Praksis - Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 27–44., <https://doi.org/10.5324/eip.v11i2.2052>.

Summary

For years urban architecture has excluded unwanted groups of people from various locations. This type of architecture can be referred to as defensive architecture or hostile architecture. Within recent years this architecture has been more predominant throughout the city. Recently it has caused an uproar within the general public with some debating that it's not a solemn way to handle the worst off in the population. This architecture is used in various countries such as the UK, Sweden and the United States. The people who have the power over these constructions consist of politicians, landlords, and owners of small shops. The question here is if the design of the architecture could be considered as discriminations against the less fortunate. It's an understanding of whether this violates both peoples rights and dignity. The designs of this architecture vary for example benches having armrests or slopes that make it uncomfortable to sleep. Stainless steel has also been used to make the construction slippery. Other examples include spikes which are called anti-homeless spikes and are placed in various areas like on the ground or on a windowsill. This prevents people from sitting or standing there. With this there is also less noticeable hostile architecture like large plant boxes or other objects in areas where panhandlers are usually found. Another way that has been used to exclude unwanted individuals is to completely remove a structure such as a bench. In most scenarios, it's easier to remove a construction rather than altering its design. It starts to become clearer that the people who are less fortunate are not wanted within a society.

Reflection

I do agree with De Fine Licht theory that hostile architecture tells homeless people that they are not wanted within our society. It starts to become clear that all this architecture is being used to exclude the homeless. This architecture is mostly being placed where homeless people tend to panhandle. It also makes these structures impossible to sleep on. De Fine Licht provides a lot of visuals of the architecture which helped me to realize that this architecture is meant to keep people away rather than to stay. It begs the question, could we consider this discrimination if were excluding a group of people?

Quotation

“But for those who are so vulnerable as to not have a bed to sleep in, they is another slap in the face-very clear signs that they are not welcome in the social community”(4).

Citation#2

iilluminaughtii. (2021, December 23). *Hostile architecture: The fight against the homeless | prism of the past*. YouTube. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bITz9yQPjy8%29>

Summary

The author gives many examples of how hostile architecture is being used and their causes and effects, as well as a brief history behind hostile architecture and how it started. “The idea of controlling human behavior by building outdoor space around them dates back to the French Revolution. After the revolution, many narrow streets were replaced with wide boulevards. This was done so to repress any kind of rebellion. What came out of this was the start of using architecture to keep out unwanted people”. It is pointed out that Robert Moses, a former secretary, was one of the first to use architecture to discriminate against black people. One example is the Long Island Parkway which had a clearance too low for buses to travel under. The result of this was anyone who did not have a car, particularly low income families, were not able to visit Mosses parks. Over the past fifteen years, hostile architecture has been increasing according to Cara Chellew, a Toronto based researcher. “There's been an increased focus on public spaces in city buildings. We're creating public spaces but within public spaces there is the intention to keep public space orderly and maintained, to save on policing costs or to reduce maintenance and vandalism”. It was pointed out in one of the articles that she quotes that hostile architecture is “ an unkindness that is considered, designed, approved, funded and made real with the explicit motive to exclude and harass”. Examples of these types of architecture consist of concrete benches that are sloped so it's uncomfortable to sleep on. Spikes are used to deter people from loitering in a certain area, especially panhandlers. In the Canadian city of Calgary, authorities have covered the ground beneath the Louise Bridge with bowling ball sized rocks to prevent homeless people from taking shelter there by making it

uncomfortable. Public benches around the world now feature more armrests to deter people from sleeping on them. A tanning salon in Bristol installed sprinklers to spray people loitering on the property. There was also a church in San Francisco that also used sprinklers to deter homeless people from sleeping under the doorway. Bike racks that are rarely used have been installed in areas where homeless people tend to set up camp.

Reflection

The author provides a multitude of examples to link hostile architecture to discrimination. The architecture is rather cruel than beneficial to a society. Most of the examples provided only seem to target people who are homeless. Bike racks being set up where homeless tend to set up camp. Sprinklers to deter people from staying in a certain area. Spikes being placed where panhandlers congregate. A good sum of the architecture in this video primarily targets the homeless population. If what Robert Mosses did is considered discrimination then why can't this type of hostile architecture also being considered discrimination.

Quotation

In the video at (11:17/30:37) the author reads a quote from an article from the Guardian saying "hostile architecture is It is a sort of unkindness that is considered, designed, approved, funded and made real with the explicit motive to exclude and harass".

Citation#3

Jock, Kaitlin. "You Are Not Welcome Here: Anti-Homeless Architecture Crops up Nationwide." *Street Roots*, Street Roots, 9 June 2019, <https://www.streetroots.org/news/2019/06/07/you-are-not-welcome-here-anti-homeless-architecture-crops-nationwide> (Accessed: October 26, 2022).

Summary

In this journal article by Kaitlin Jock, she takes the stand that hostile architecture is unfair to the homeless. It sheds light on the different ways architecture is used to deter unwanted people. She has singled out New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and California as being just some states that have implemented some kind of hostile architecture. Some examples are outright cruel to homeless people. She goes on to say that "New York City's long-famed Strand Bookstore installed sprinklers as part of its iconic awning, spraying people seeking shelter and sleeping under it. Another example that was given is that in Portland planters were placed under bridges so people can't rest there when it rains. She does bring out the fact that the homeless do belong in shelters. However, oftentimes people will feel better outside than they do in shelters due to the safety conditions in shelters. In San Francisco, benches were removed in the middle of night. Also, "UV treated paint that forces urine to bounce back on the person that is urinating was implemented in San Francisco". In Sacramento, metal balls were placed on ledges so people cannot sit. In Philadelphia, benches were installed which are curved and slotted with metal bars dividing them into sections.

Reflection

This article by Jock Kaitlin has partially answered my question on whether homeless people are being discriminated against. Prior to reading this article, I knew that permanent structures were part of hostile architecture. However, I didn't know the extremes that organizations would go to to deter unwanted behavior. I believe that the sprinklers and the UV treated paint are some extreme measures. The article also enlightened me of other states that are affected by hostile architecture. I agree with the author that I find this hostile architecture discriminatory.

Quotation

Near the end of this article the author states "There are people who need public space more than people who desire it".

Conclusion

After researching this subject, it does seem that hostile architecture is unsympathetic to those less fortunate. There are just so many facts and examples against this type of architecture that it's hard to believe it's beneficial for a society. Before I started with my research of hostile architecture,, my thoughts were that any type of this kind of architecture does not benefit a society and just makes matters worse for people, especially the homeless. However, after reading the peer reviewed article from de Fine Licht, I learned that a portion of this architecture could be beneficial for some. For example, public store owners who want an aesthetic appeal in front of their store to entice customers (de Fine Licht 5). Also, I do see the ramifications that it has on the working class people. For example, take a person who is coming home for a hard day's work and is waiting for the bus. All they want to do is rest their feet but can not because a homeless person has made the bus stop bench their bed.

The problem I found in my research is that there is no complete study of hostile architecture showing if the pros outweigh the cons. While there are some good uses for this construction, it's hard to ignore all the other examples of this architecture doing more harm than good. Hostile architecture is a band aid solution for the homeless crisis. Instead of trying to fix the root cause of homelessness, we are just relocating them to the point where they have nowhere to go and feel somewhat safe. It's like a reminder to them that they are not wanted here. "But for those who are so vulnerable as to not have a bed to sleep in, that is another slap in the face and a very clear signal that they are not welcome in the social community" (de Fine Licht 4). Just like there are Republicans and Democrats, there will always be two sides on the topic of hostile architecture. One is not wanting homeless people in your community. Then there are those who feel the homeless are part of our society and need to be taken better care of. I believe that instead of funding for hostile architecture, we should put this funding to homeless shelters. While some might not want to have a homeless shelter constructed near them, we need to remember that these people aren't animals. They're human beings who have the right to live just as much as us. If America is supposed to be the land of opportunity and chance, why are we stripping this away from the homeless? Don't you believe that they should get a second chance to land back on their feet? In the end, I believe it will take an electoral vote to determine if these architectural structures will stay in place. I believe this info should be directed to politicians to make a change in the funding from hostile architecture to the root cause of homelessness.

