Prison Puzzle

The social context
It is inappropriately a stigma to be an inmate in a prison. Society has taught you that you should be isolated, locked away, and isolated from other people's company. In the case of a desert prison, the spatial separation even places you in a landscape remote not only from other humans, but also from most animals, and even most kinds of plants. Here prisoners find themselves confined to live with prisoners, each with their own respective, tragic history.

"Can a prison make the world a better place?"
Can architecture create a place that allows the building of a new identity, in the company of people who must themselves try to change their lives? Can this happen in a desert prison, of all places, built for isolating people, and set in a barren landscape? We believe that it can, but a personal and individual growth will have to take root in the mind of every prisoner in order for a lasting change to take place.

These personal changes, we believe, must start from the assumption that inmates must, in the future, become citizens again who take on their responsibilities in society. Inmates must be taught confidence that these tasks can once again be tackled. Trust in one's own abilities. In turn, comes from a task solved without external interference, a work well done by oneself - just from an individual achievement to be proud of as a person. The realization, we believe, would underlie the design of a prison that does not lock prisoners away just to punish them, but that integrates inmates to allow them to develop in positive ways - unhampered by their social background, and past tragic histories.

The may sound like ambitions too noble to be true. But, we think, feasible goals can be set by a prison's architecture to actually achieve them.

Consistent work is needed to cultivate edible plants in desert surroundings. If inmates can help grow part of their own sustenance in the facility, the rewards and benefits of persistence and patience can be experienced first-hand. From improbable conditions, surprising results can be achieved. We therefore propose to build a green house in the desert:

- **Hanging gardens** are placed adjacent to the cells, shaded by moving solar panels. These allow for the cultivation of vegetables and fruit for daily consumption.

- **Roof gardens** are situated on the prison complex.

- **Root gardens** surrounding the whole complex and enable extensive forms of agriculture.

Inmate life revolves around the cultivation of different kinds of plants, appropriately picked for each of these areas. Changes in planting schemes help to educate in a variety of agricultural techniques.

The spatial concept of the new prison and the living cells themselves are modelled after traditional pueblo architecture. Densely terraced, multi-level habitation units - each a simple cubicle - are an ideal adaptation to the desert surroundings. They furthermore allow for economic building costs, and future changes and additions that amount to a coherent overall architecture of the prison as a whole. Each **living cell** is a module of approx. 13 x 6 m and can host up to four inhabitants. Each cell is equipped with interior washing areas and outdoor decks ("hanging gardens"). In a medium security facility, no further sub-differentiation of cell types (e.g. for solitary confinement) need to be built, further reducing building costs.

The terraced outer formation of the living cells creates interior spaces, such as assembly halls with multi-level galleries. Between cells, large cylindrical structures - **sun catchers** - filter light and controlled levels of warmth to the interior. Administration offices, as well as toilet rooms, and other common rooms can be set at lower levels, to allow for cooler temperatures in places that are used for extended periods of time during the day. The proposed building has a length of 186 m and a width varying from 30 to 40 m.

If, as a society, we want new hope to grow from lives gone wrong, we should cultivate that growth.