

Veiskillet crossroads

The meaning of
architectural quality
in housing for the
social identity of
formerly homeless.
A case study of
Veiskillet in Trondheim,
Norway.

(Hauge & Støa, 2008)
Pictures by Bård
Helland



Church City Mission:
Housing project for 6 young people with a history
of drug abuse and crime.



Is it possible to use a dwelling as a strategy to positively affect a person's sense of dignity?



Theory on housing & identity:

Symbolic interactionist perspective

Social
Identity
theory



Method: Case study

Interviews with initiator, employees and residents.

On-site inspections.

Literature studies of presentations of the housing project in the media, written material from the architect, the jury's statement (*Norwegian government's 2007 architectural style prize*).

Residents

Older than 25, recently released from of prison.

“High threshold offer”

- demand that residents be motivated and show a willingness to change.



Results:

All residents positive to their housing situation, however, some more enthusiastic than others.

They appreciate the environment.

“This building, it inspires you to take care of it.”



Results: Some of them mention the architecture related to their view of themselves and their life.

“If this place had been a rundown dump, your quality of life would have just gone to hell, quite simply. So here you get a little extra push.”



“As a drug abuser, you’re used to shutting out the world as much as possible. And then I came here and had a whole wall as a window! But those are old thoughts. It’s really nice to let the light in. But it’s a change that you have to make in yourself, isn’t it.”

Results: The building leads to more positive social contact.

“I just think about what it might look like where I lived before. So the difference between that and this place is just night and day.”

“Do you think that people would perceive you differently now that you have moved here?”

“Yes, I think so. My mother, for example, is proud of me!”



Conclusion:

Quality housing may strengthen a message about inclusion, safety, tolerance and control.

BUT this contribution is dynamic, and it is dependent on other situational factors as well.



The physical environment may be a strategic instrument in counteracting social exclusion of former homeless criminals and drug addicts.

Further research is needed to make more general conclusions.

