



The Problem with Hostile Design

Hostile design, also known as defensive architecture, is an urban-design strategy that deters and restricts people from ‘abusing’ certain public spaces. If you’ve been in an American city-scape, you’ve probably come across something akin to this. Examples would include park benches with awkward handles in the middle of them that make laying down uncomfortable and bolts and sharp edges attached to steps of a building also to discourage sleeping and loitering. In the case of hostile design, architects work to deter homeless people from loitering and sleeping in public places.

Imagine being homeless, and every night, you sleep on a bench in a park. You’re unable to gain access to a shelter and, with limited options, this seems to be the most comfortable and safe area you can access. One day, when you walk into the park, you find a bar in the middle of every bench. A bar that makes it impossible to sleep comfortably, and forces you to move elsewhere. How would you feel? Segregated? Agitated? Scared? This is what hostile design does. It displaces those in need of lodging and care and basically tosses their needs aside. There’s an obvious issue with this sort of architecture, as it quite literally segregates the homeless and displaces them. While hostile architecture may originally seem like a good deterrent of loitering and public nuisance, it’s inherent targeting of homeless populations sour said intentions. It targets the most vulnerable and limits their already miniscule options. By forcing displacement, homeless people are forced to leave behind areas they’re already accustomed to. Hostile

architecture also has the capabilities to force homeless people into dangerous and unsafe areas, as they are often ostracized from 'safer' areas due to the harmful stigma connecting homeless peoples to deviants. The name defensive architecture is also harmful in practice, as it suggests homeless people to be things of harm. It suggests that homeless people just existing is a problem in and of itself, and is something that other people have to be protected from. No matter what, homeless people are a part of the community. They are people like us and deserve to be welcomed and treated as such. Hostile design exiles homeless people and tells them that they aren't welcome. It blames homeless people for living, for sitting, for sleeping. All I can describe it as is, inhumane.

Hostile design also allows people to simply ignore the issues of homelessness. By forcing them to move elsewhere, we don't have to confront the reality of a homelessness crisis in America. By forcing them to move elsewhere, we can move on guilt free without ever questioning if we're doing enough to help. By forcing them to move elsewhere, we are killing them, we are abandoning them, and we're allowing ignorance to fester. Out of sight, out of mind, but the problem continues. The homelessness crisis doesn't get any better thanks to spikes in the pavement and bars on benches. Instead of sinking money into the inhumanity of hostile design, we should focus on funding shelters and programs that actually help the homeless. We should focus on prevention and rehabilitation rather than catering to those with money and prejudice. Hostile design allows people to turn a blind eye to the homelessness issue, and it does nothing to solve it.

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