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THE OTHER SIDE OF CPTED

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In 1969, Oscar Newman coined the expression "defensible space" as a surrogate term for a range of mechanisms, real and symbolic barriers, strongly defined areas of influence, and improved opportunities for surveillance that combine to bring the environment under the control of its residents.

Newman suggests that design would return productive use of public areas in housing environments beyond the doors of individual apartments back to the users. Hallways, lobbies, grounds, and surrounding streets have usually been considered beyond the control of building inhabitants.

Newman's effort in developing defensible space design concepts for urban dwellers led law enforcement to include crime prevention in its arsenal of strategies. The theory of defensible space came from a major research effort known as crime prevention through environmental design or CPTED. The emphasis of this crime prevention movement was to return control of the built environment to law-abiding users.

To implement defensible space and environmental design concepts, it is necessary to have consensus - cohesion or cooperation among the residents, owners, and managers of the specific environment. Financial resources are needed to implement

security measures, make physical design improvements, hire staff for additional security, and improve the technology and communication network systems to facilitate reporting and surveillance of incidents.

Defensible space and CPTED strategies, however, have not been successfully implemented in most low-income urban public housing environments. Due to the lack of resources or commitment, low-income public housing has more crime and drugs than 20 years ago. Newman states that the following four elements of physical design, both individually and in concert, contribute to the creation of secure environments.

Territorial definition

The first element is the territorial definition of the physical environment, which is the area of influence of the inhabitants. This definition works by subdividing the residential environment into zones toward which residents easily adopt proprietary attitudes. Residents become responsible for the cleanliness and safety of the space as if it were their own.

Natural surveillance

The second element is the positioning of apartment windows to allow residents to survey the exterior and interior public areas of their living environment naturally. The goal of surveillance is to avoid designing blind spots and allow supervision of open areas that legitimate residents use in a safe manner.

Building form

The third element is adaptation of the building form to avoid the stigma of peculiarity that allows others to perceive the vulnerability and isolation of the inhabitants.

Compatible building placement

The fourth element is enhancing safety by locating residential developments in functionally sympathetic urban areas adjacent to nonthreatening activities. Placing compatible-use building types together is a key concept in zoning and building codes and land use plans.

Territorial behavior involves personalizing or marking a place or object and communicating that it is owned by a person or group. Defensive responses may sometimes occur when territorial boundaries are violated.

A range of territories make up a person's territorial network. These include public,

secondary, and private territories. The longer a person resides in a territory, the more psychologically comfortable and familiar he or she becomes with it. For example, public territories, such as bus seats or city sidewalks, are the least personalized. Secondary territories, such as neighborhoods, which are also characterized by shared ownership among members of a group or culture, are more familiar and personalized. Primary territories, such as homes and apartments, are most personalized.

Defensible space as Newman had envisioned it was to be evolved in a social and spatial hierarchy from private to semi-private to semi-public to public space.

Such observations led Newman to promote the use of defensible space designs, which allow residents to survey their territory and clearly articulate the boundaries between public and private regions. These designs support the residents' latent territoriality and sense of community and allow them control over their neighborhoods. Prospective criminals who detect an atmosphere of mutual neighborly concern are presumably discouraged from initiating or completing crimes.

Since 1970, numerous studies and applications of CPTED and defensible space have emerged but have met with only limited, short-term success. By the end of the 1970s defensible space and CPTED concepts fell into relative obscurity. These concepts have fallen on hard times due to the lack of resources to make the operational and physical changes needed and lack of consensus by the users or persons with power.

The law-abiding community generally lacks control over the built environment and does not have the long-term commitment to cope with the slowness of change. As budget cutbacks became inevitable during the Reagan administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development was not in a position to implement the costly and staff-intensive changes needed to reduce criminal opportunity in public housing.

Middle and upper-income private sector housing environments have resources to provide security for building users, Those environments have successfully implemented features for:

- spotting criminals - identifying persons or strangers who do not belong in the specific environment; providing surveillance of others - children, neighbors, property, and unusual behavior
- reporting problems to the police
- providing a communication network - using walkie-talkies or calling for police assistance or intervention

- making improvements to the environment to reduce the opportunity for crime - providing security grilling on windows, solid core doors, alarm systems, attack dogs, dead bolt locks, etc.

Thus, architectural design is necessary to create spaces that can be defended, but actual intervention by legitimate users of the environment depends on:

- a sense of responsibility and control over the environment
- the territory
- access to effective methods of intervention
- commitment and involvement in the neighborhood
- relatively little fear of predatory crime and reprisal

Windows are of little value if they are not used by the residents or there is nothing to see. Observing a criminal act does no good if the witness fails to act because of fear, social disorganization, apathy, uncertainty, or the inability to make a difference.

Poor definition can create spaces that are widely perceived as dangerous where intervention does not occur. But good defensible space design does not guarantee a space will appear safe or will become part of a territory that residents will defend.

The presence of criminals or strangers in architecturally defined safe places, such as lobbies or playgrounds, may give the user a sense of danger. Likewise, familiarity with the environment and expectation of resident intervention can inspire a sense of safety in more hazardous architectural environments, such as parking lots and entryways.

Spaces may be defensible but not defended if the social organization for effective defense is lacking. Residents will not look out a well-positioned window if there is nothing to see.

Another major group of users who have successfully used the principles of defensible space and CPTED are drug dealers and criminals. Dealers and criminals have intuitively understood the concepts of creating territory, surveillance, and access control. Drug dens and criminal hot spots incorporate the CPTED principles for the illicit purpose of creating a safe or offensible space to conduct crime.

For example, criminals, protected in their fortresses, use offensible space features to:

- spot police and outsiders
- survey others approaching the area

- report problems to those in command
- provide a communications network to warn dealers of approaching police
- make improvements to the environment to slow down police entry and prevent drug thefts.

Criminals have access to the two key requirements for successfully implementing offensible space - resources and consensus. Drug dealers and criminals have access to large amounts of money illegally earned to make the necessary physical and operational changes for security.

Consensus is achieved through total control of the environment with power of intimidation and the willingness to back up their intentions. Thus, the use of defensible space and environmental design strategies for enhancing security for the criminal element and obstructing justice is referred to as offensible space.

Criminals are using access control, surveillance, and territorial strategies to obstruct law enforcement and ensure the security of their illegal businesses. Signs of defense are symbolic and real barriers and territorial markers.

As the criminals feel more proprietary and responsible for the space, they embellish, maintain, and defend it more. Taking advantage of the socially disorganized, heterogeneous, noncriminal population, the homogenous criminal groups are more likely to exert territorial control over nearby spaces than heterogeneous groups are.

The offensible space model suggests that a combination of sociocultural characteristics, design, and social networking may determine the strength and depth of territorial perceptions and behaviors. These proprietary perceptions and behaviors are felt by fellow criminals and intruders.

A study was conducted to measure offensible space features at 21 known crime sites in South Florida. The negative use of access control, surveillance, and territoriality features was surveyed, and data was gathered from field surveys and personal observations.

The sites under study were identified by the police as locations with repeated arrests for drug offenses or histories of criminal and drug activity. Sites, primarily low-rise structures, consisted of apartments, houses, crack house, abandoned structures, duplexes, and apartment buildings where the entire building worked in cooperation with drug dealers.

The following access control features were observed in the crime sites:

- screening by criminals
- boarded or barred windows
- reinforced door locks to prevent break-ins
- access to public areas with multiple escape routes

Surveillance control strategies used at the crime sites included the following: Juveniles who cannot be convicted or receive substantial legal sanction for aiding the dealer were extensively used as spotters. The spotters provide an informal, effective audiovisual surveillance network and alarm system. The spotters may earn hundreds of dollars per day by shouting warning codes when police or outsiders approach.

- Peepholes were installed in heavily reinforced doors to screen visitors
- Surveillance venues were situated well. The most common location for an offensible space is an apartment or building on a corner. The buildings are usually linear and do not allow a direct view of doors from the street. The corner vantage point allows better surveillance on who is approaching the building.
- Houses that were criminal sites were located more frequently in the middle of the block, insulated by surrounding properties and providing multiple escape routes.

The study sites used territorial features to solidify the criminals' sphere of influence. In The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jane Jacobs refers to citizens taking control of the streets with increased participation. Criminals have been claiming the streets and semi-public areas as part of the sphere of their offensible space. Sidewalks and streets adjoining the main drug and crime site quickly became part of the turf of the criminal. Fences, walls, and barricades are commonly established to create a series of barriers for police or law-abiding citizens.

The sense of proprietorship or territoriality is made real by the employees of the drug dealer. They act as look outs, enforcers, and distributing agents. If a person at the offensible space site is not there to do business, he or she is made to feel uncomfortable quickly and experience a sense of danger and risk for personal safety.

A series of behavioral and environmental cues are given to the noncriminal that state he or she has entered an offensible space zone. The combination of muscle enforcers at access points, the dilapidated condition of the area, the racial and ethnic homogeneity, openness of the drug dealing, and level of related violence indicate a present danger to anyone who does not belong there or does not do business with the dealer.

Thus, there is a pattern of offensible space features used at the 21 study sites. The

criminals use defensible space tactics to enhance crime. Newman suggests that architecture can create, encounter, or prevent crime. Certain kinds of space and layout favor the clandestine activities of criminals. Some disagree with this architectural deterministic view and suggest that architecture's role in behavior is difficult to measure. An issue that is sometimes overlooked is the quality of the people gravitating to these spaces. If these criminal sites were located in a middle- or upper-class neighborhood, would there still be crime there or would the surrounding influence drive away the criminal element?

The majority of people in the law-abiding community cannot afford defensible space tactics, nor do they have the power or consensus to implement the strategies uniformly.

Environmental security design features are relatively successful in affluent residences due to owner subsidizing. The owners can provide a doorperson for screening visitors, exterior lighting, parking access control alarm systems, communications networking with building users, and security staff.

However, the majority of Americans cannot afford the high rent or mortgages to receive defensible space advantages. The public does not have money, energy, or muscle to back the commitment to keeping criminals away. The law-abiding community usually cannot achieve consensus to put up walls, change street design, hire police, get better lighting, erect guardhouses or barricades, and hire competent architects knowledgeable in security design.

Criminals can successfully use offensible space tactics in their criminal environments because they have the resources, the power, and the ability make the changes they desire. Criminals have substantially more control of their working and living environment than does the average law-abiding citizen.

The solution to offensible space lies in a comprehensive, multilevel approach to crime prevention. Jeffrey proposes primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention strategies. Crime must be attacked at the root causes, not just at the symptoms.

This problem can be attacked in steps. One step to reduce offensible space sites is to identify them, the owner of criminal activity if appropriate, and then confiscate or down the property using nuisance abatement ordinances as the legal vehicle. Police are using the Racke Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act and other forfeiture laws to confiscate properties and put criminals out of business.

Another step to reduce offensible space is to have the built environment support good, accountable building management practices. Competent architecture will

provide carefully laid out circulation patterns and avoid conflicts. Good architecture and design allow legitimate users to exert their positive influence. Building management is the link to follow through maintenance and image problems, provide accountability on who has access to the property for legitimate purposes and evict and otherwise punish troublemakers.

Offensible space is a by-product o society's inability to apply crime prevention and law enforcement uniformly in the community. Offensible space is a result of the community's disorganization and lack of citizen consensus. Offensible space is the effect of criminals being organized, motivated, and well financed to create a crime environment that is resistant to outside intrusion. Until the law·abiding community achieves organization and consensus and commits adequate resources to fighting the criminal community, offensible space sites will continue to grow and pose a clear and present danger to society.

(from Security Management, March 1991)