

Understanding "CPTED"

by Timothy Crowe

The concept of "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design" (CPTED) has emerged worldwide as one of the most promising and currently effective approaches to reducing the opportunity for crime. Dramatic results have been achieved in every imaginable environmental setting ranging from small stores to entire residential communities. Much is known about the relationships and causal links between street design, traffic control and behavior management. How space is designed and used directly affects profit, productivity and quality of life.

CPTED is based on the theory that the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement in the quality of life. CPTED concepts can be applied to an individual building as well as to an entire neighborhood.

Using design to foster security has its origins in the early history of the development of communities. Early Sumerian codes (4000 B.C.) identified the importance of respect for property rights, while the Codes of Hammurabi (2000 B.C.) introduced the responsibilities of builders to their clients. Eighth century Chinese practitioners of Feng Shui promoted the design of harmony in space from the size of the smallest rooms to the planning of cities. Native American cliff dwellers at the same time were developing hierarchies of family and community identity and protection through the design of living space, building impregnable living areas on the face of cliffs accessible only by ladders.

Contemporary research generally supports the notion that space that is widely shared by people, and poorly identified, will result in low morale, reduced productivity and greater tolerance for misbehavior.

CPTED is based on three overlapping strategies:

- 1) Natural access control

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- 2) Natural surveillance
- 3) Territorial reinforcement

Access control is a design concept directed at decreasing the opportunity for crime. Access control strategies are typically classified as: organized (e.g., guards), mechanical (e.g., locks), and natural (e.g., spatial definition). The primary thrust of an access control strategy is to deny access to a crime target and to create a perception of risk in offenders.

Surveillance is directed at keeping intruders under observation. Therefore, the primary aim of a surveillance strategy is to facilitate observation. Surveillance strategies can also be classified as organized (e.g., police patrol), mechanical (e.g., lighting), and natural (e.g., viewing through windows).

Traditionally, access control and surveillance have emphasized mechanical or organized crime prevention techniques. More recent approaches to the physical design of environments have shifted the emphasis to natural crime prevention techniques. This shift in emphasis has led to the concept of territoriality, which suggests that physical design can create or expand a sphere of influence so that users develop a sense of proprietorship — a sense of territorial influence — and potential offenders perceive this territorial influence.

CPTED strategies have emerged from history and from contemporary crime pre-

vention experiments. Most of the strategies are self-evident. That is, the reader will probably think, "I knew that!"

Let me briefly note some of the major CPTED strategies:

- *Provide clear border definition of controlled space.* Boundaries may be identified physically or symbolically, and can include fences, shrubbery or signs. The underlying principal is that a "reasonable individual" must be able to recognize the transition from public to private space.

- *Provide clearly marked transitional zones.* It is important to provide clearly marked transitional zones so that users know when they are moving from public to semi-public to private space.

- *Place safe activities in unsafe locations.* Safe activities serve as magnets for normal users. Within reason, this strategy may be used to overcome problems on school campuses, parks, offices, or institutional settings.

- *Redesignate the use of space to provide natural barriers.* Conflicting activities may be separated by distance, natural terrain, or by other functions to avoid fear-producing conflict.

- *Redesign or revamp space to increase the perception of natural surveillance.* The perception of surveillance is more powerful than its reality. Hidden cameras do little to make normal users feel safer. Likewise, abnormal users do not feel at greater risk when they are oblivious to surveillance potentials. Windows, clear lines-of-sight, and other natural techniques are often as effective as the use of mechanical or organized (e.g., guards) methods.

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