The logic of CPTED for public security. Notes on possibilities and limits.

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I don't think that architecture is only about shelter, is only about a very simple enclosure. It should be able to excite you, to calm you, to make you think.

Zaha Hadid

In order to address crime it is popular to use situational crime prevention (Clarke & Felson, 1993; Hayward, 2007). This all the more true in a business setting. Although bound by time and space, it is a visible strategy offering immediate results for those tasked to protect assets. By setting up barriers it protects valuable assets such as people, property and information (ASIS International, 2018). Due to obstacles put in place, these assets become less attractive for potential adversaries. In technical speech this is referred to as ‘target hardening’. In the setting of business continuity the protection of assets is pretty straightforward; without employees, buildings or instructions it will be virtually impossible for any organization to produce something of value like goods or services. Physical security is therefore crucial in safeguarding the smooth operation of work processes. A translation of physical security can take many different forms like setting up a perimeter or using vaults. In both cases a distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate users. There are those who are allowed to enter the premises and within the premises there are those who have access to the safe. The illegitimate users are to be excluded from these assets. In numerous organizations there are degrees of clearance with the intention of keeping out intruders who might compromise the work processes. In security management layered protection is about deterring, denying, detecting and delaying (‘the four D’s’) any type of intrusion (IFPO, 2010). These environmental principles could be applied to a number of settings.

How to understand these principles in the world of public security? What are the assets and who is to be excluded? As medieval castles illustrate, principles of design are not foreign to cities. High walls and gates control the flow of people coming and going. The modern city is much more open and its assets are also much more public. One could argue, openness in itself might be an asset. Sennett (2018) makes an argument for porous boundaries enabling sociability. This poses problems for physical security, which is often understood in terms of excluding illegitimate users. Due to the inherent openness of city life there is less room for denying entrance or delaying penetration. Such a fortress mentality sits uneasily with public space where people might hang out for various reasons. One could argue encounters with strangers could be enriching and might offer opportunities. In urban planning, physical security is more and more factored in by using the insights of situational crime prevention (Newman, 1972; Colquhoun, 2004). At the same time one should be aware of securitization (Zedner, 2009) and respect the core purpose of openness (Sennett, 2018). In thinking this through this paper will reflect on the possibilities and limits of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) (Crowe, 1991). A proposition is made to include more legitimate users and more importantly observers for this will be effective in terms of deterrence and detection. By drawing from notions such as social control and social cohesion, it will be argued it is possible to discourage anti-social behavior by encouraging social behavior via the built environment.

CPTED provides for clear principles in spatial organization in order to increase objective and subjective safety. This does not necessarily require harsh security measures. It is about using the characteristics of the built environment in the prevention of crime. The main thought is that the right design and appropriate use of space can lead to less crime and an increased experience of safety. The three main points of departure in this approach are natural surveillance, natural access control and natural territorial reinforcement (clear, possibly enforced demarcation of property) in which natural surveillance and natural access control limit chances of criminal behavior and territorial demarcation facilitates social control. Other elements include maintenance as an expression of ownership of property and activity support as a way to increase the use of a built environment for safe activities. The notion of ‘natural’ implies that the
prevention of crime starts with a commitment from all those directly affected by crime in the capacity of illegitimate and legitimate users as well as observers. What unites the legitimate users and the observers is the vested interest of upholding the quality of life in a particular neighborhood. Observers are crucial in this regard for they provide the ‘eyes and ears’ on the street as argued by Jacobs (1961) in her influential book on city life. This is the equivalent to ‘situational awareness’ in an organization.

There are interesting similarities to be explored. What can both businesses and cities learn from each other in terms of best practices and policy transfers? Think about the logic of ‘clean desk’ and ‘broken windows’ as policies both preventing disorder albeit in different worlds. I think corporations and municipalities can benefit greatly from cross-fertilization between the domains of industrial and public security. However, there are crucial differences between these domains making the application of CPTED very much dependent on context.

References


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Biography
Juul Gooren has a MSc in Criminology and a LLM in Criminal Law from Erasmus University Rotterdam. His PhD was awarded by the Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology of Leiden University. He has over ten years of teaching experience at Leiden University, The Hague University of Applied Sciences as well as Metropolitan State University Denver (US). Since its inception in 2010 he has been teaching for the Safety and Security Management Studies programme. As a senior lecturer he mostly teaches courses and runs projects in relation to public safety. As a researcher he is currently a member of the lectorate Philosophy and Professional Practice. His research focuses on the notion of resilience and how it can be applied to organizations and communities. The purpose of this study is to create an exchange of strategies used in the world of industrial safety ("resilience engineering") and public safety ("building resilient communities").