

The Next Evolution of CPTED

Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed ...

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Over the years, and at every Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) convention I have ever attended, I've heard the question "what is the next evolution of CPTED". After working in the field for approximately seven years, and assessing where we are, where we've been and where we need to be, I believe the third CPTED concept of territoriality would benefit from formal development.

Currently, territoriality is a somewhat nebulous concept that stands alone on most CPTED organizational charts yet is described as an umbrella strategy that encompasses the other, better developed CPTED strategies known as surveillance and access control. Known by its generally accepted definition as a design strategy that "realizes that physical design can extend or create a sphere of influence so that users of the property develop a sense of proprietorship" the lack of development around this concept fails to suggest how this is done.

In response to this problem, I propose the following model that recognizes the characteristics unique to this concept and builds upon the ground work laid by Oscar Newman, James Q. Wilson, George Kelling and others. Specifically, I see territoriality as being divided into two subcategories pertaining to occupancy.

In the pre-occupancy phase, I see defensible space and design durability as being paramount in importance. The term defensible space was first popularized by Oscar Newman and has generally been used to "describe a residential environment whose physical characteristics--building layout and site plan--function to allow inhabitants themselves to become the key agents in ensuring their own security".

The formal inclusion of defensible space provides a theoretical basis for the concept of territoriality.

Added to this is the concept of design durability. Design durability comes from my own observations pertaining to structures that fail to wear. In one such example, narrow grass berms emerged from the paved entrance pathway to an older children's playground. While the berms help to carve out the space from the neighbouring children's play area, their slope and narrow profile baked the grass and promoted run-off making it difficult to sustain grass. This, combined with a child's natural inclination to take the shortest route between playgrounds, resulted in the bermed grass between play area's being completely worn off, an event that appears to have precipitated vandalism to the play area themselves.

In a much more common example, walls are often constructed with little regard for the potential for graffiti. This results in many visible, highly desirable walls being constructed with inappropriate surfaces having no regard to exposure. This encourages the spread of graffiti which, like the premature wear of the grassed berms, can be taken as a negative environmental cue that, in the absence of timely and frequent maintenance can trigger more destructive forces.

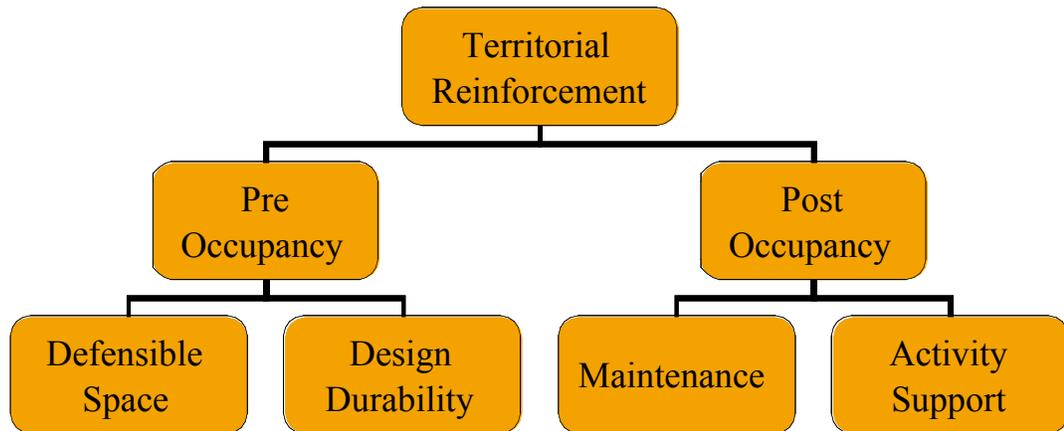
What cannot be prevented by design, leads us to the post occupancy phase. In this phase I see maintenance and activity support as being paramount in importance. The need for maintenance can best be described by the broken window theory. This theory recognizes that human behaviour is strongly influenced by order and disorder and that the appearance of order and upkeep in a neighbourhood makes people feel safe and deters criminals.

The formal acknowledgement of the role of maintenance within territoriality, will establish this principle at an appropriate level and order while bringing generally accepted CPTED theory closer to the more progressive practitioners who have already adopted maintenance as the fourth "unofficial" concept.

Where maintenance alone is insufficient, activity support can be added. Activity support can be defined as programs for residents to discourage offenders, enhance crime prevention, increase community involvement and provide social services. The need for activity support will vary according to the property. In areas such as amphitheatres, the need for activity support is high. In more active, impromptu settings such as basketball courts, the need for activity support is low. Regardless of the need for activity support, all areas can benefit from such non-traditional forms of activity as safety audits. Diagrammatically, this enhanced form of territoriality can be represented as follows:

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Added to the natural, mechanical and organized forms of surveillance and access control, it provides a much more informative, balanced and representative outline to people being introduced to the concept. It also recognizes the inherent shift in pre and post occupancy phases that is unique to territoriality.

In order for CPTED to develop, I believe that generally accepted CPTED theory must first evolve to encapsulate more substantive knowledge. Without it we are unlikely to begin the much anticipated evolutionary process that will attract new interest, energy and relevance and energy to our mature and static field.

Published in Security Management magazine as "What Should be CPTED's Next Step?" in December 1998.