

Crime Opportunity Profiling of Streets (COPS)

The principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) are based on the premise that the environment can provide opportunities for crime to occur, and therefore changes in the environment can prevent and reduce crime.

The aim of CPTED is to reduce the opportunities for crime by the effective design and use of the built environment. CPTED draws heavily on behavioural psychology by examining the relationships between people and their environment. The way people behave in an environment is often determined by the 'cues' they pick up from that environment. These cues can make legitimate users of a space feel safe and can also deter illegitimate users (such as potential offenders) from pursuing undesirable behaviour.

CPTED is based on a number of leading crime theories, including 'Broken Windows Syndrome', in which environments that appear dirty and neglected give the impression that no-one cares and that anti-social behaviour is acceptable. Failure to correct minor problems, such as broken windows, graffiti and litter, can lead to a spiral of decline and a fear avoidance cycle in which the area is perceived as dangerous, so people with choice avoid it, leading to an even greater perception that the area is dangerous and therefore even more avoidance. 'Routine Activity Theory' is another relevant crime prevention theory, in that it is suggested that, for a crime to take place, three elements need to converge: the presence of both a motivated offender and a suitable victim, and the absence of a 'capable guardian' (someone who will notice what is going on and take some form of preventative action). If one of these elements is changed, then the opportunity for a crime to occur can be reduced.

The key strategies of CPTED include territoriality, natural surveillance and access control. Territoriality, or defensible space, is about people feeling a sense of ownership over a public or semi-public space; a well defined space makes the identification of strangers much easier. Natural surveillance increases the chances of someone noticing a potential offender and will deter criminals who don't want to be seen. Access control is concerned with the location of entrances, lighting and fencing, etc. that can discourage crime.

A recent project, co-funded by the EC and the BRE Trust, was undertaken to research CPTED practice across the EU, and to develop tools and multi-disciplinary strategies for use by the police and other partners to reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. The project was managed by BRE and led by a representative Steering Group of CPTED experts and academics from the EU Member States of Estonia, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland and the UK.

The tools

A total of seven tools were evaluated, one from the UK, four from the Netherlands and two from Germany.

The tool evaluated in the UK was COPS. This is a systematic and detailed study of a street that is experiencing high levels of anti-social behaviour, street-based crime and fear of crime, and/or the effects of a street-based drug market. COPS profiling focuses on a number of contributory factors to crime and anti-social behaviour, for example, recessed doors, misused street furniture (such as benches and bus shelters), poor street lighting, under-used alleyways and unrestricted access to the rear of properties. A COPS report highlights the deficiencies of a street in terms of crime generators and provides a set of recommendations on what needs to be achieved, such as minimising street clutter and maximising surveillance. The report is given to each of the agencies involved, or the problem owners, who, in turn, carry out the work necessary to remove the crime generator.

The tools used in the Netherlands were Kids and Space, Virtual CPTED, Visual Inspection and the Police Label of Secure Housing scheme. Kids and Space challenges designers to listen to young people, and allows youngsters to contribute ideas for public space and the built environment. Young people are educated on the basic principles of urban design, make a model of the designated area, and then present their models to designers, the city council and residents' organisations. The main results of this tool are that youngsters become more involved in their environment, and planners and designers have an increased awareness of the needs of young people. Virtual CPTED uses computer programming to 'measure' the visibility aspects of a new or existing project. Visibility is an important factor

**Sharon Monahan,
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outlines the
innovative new
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in influencing feelings of safety, but can be difficult to measure from a one dimensional map. This 3-D computer simulation allows an examination of the visibility of an area, using, for example, various eye levels and different lighting conditions. The Visual Inspection scheme involves stakeholders, such as the police and town planners, carrying out a visual inspection of a particular area, creating a graphic display of offences, and drawing up a list of crime and anti-social behaviour hot spots, priorities, causes of problems and possible solutions. A commitment is then made to solve the identified problems, both in the short and long term. In the Police Label of Secured Housing scheme, environmental design, architectural measures and target hardening are used to reduce crime (mainly burglary, car crime, theft, vandalism and nuisance) and fear of crime. A police label is applied to an area that presents a list of requirements aimed at improving safety, and preventing burglary and fire.

Germany provided the Criminological Regional Analysis (CRA) and Integrated Audits schemes. The CRA provides microanalysis at a local level of the geography of crime to identify the causes. It requires a high level of co-operation and partnership working between, for example, local authorities, police, local politicians and citizen groups. The CRA results in a database on the local population, infrastructure, economy, etc., as well as information on criminal offences and fear of crime. The Integrated Audits scheme assesses an area for crime and traffic safety, and combines the information with a systematic visual inspection. It results in a detailed audit report covering buildings, streets, quarters and towns, and provides an additional decision-making basis for authorities.

Results

The main finding from this project was that the most effective approach combines:

- Physical approaches that focus on architecture, urban planning, target hardening, etc., such as CPTED and DOC (Designing Out Crime);
- Social approaches that focus on victims, offenders, management, maintenance, etc.;
- Organisational approaches that focus on partnership structures and implementation.

The research found wide ranging differences in the implementation of CPTED practices across Europe. For example, in the UK and the Netherlands, crime reduction measures are, or are about to become, part of the planning and building regulations, whereas some countries, such as Estonia and Poland, are only just becoming aware of the way in which changes in society could lead to increases in opportunistic crime.

The toolkit measures each of the tools, giving a rating from very good/high to very bad/very low, against various criteria including: costs, benefits and transferability (from one country to another or cross-border). The UK and Dutch schemes in particular showed very good results, with sharp decreases in burglary and decreases in other opportunistic crimes, such as theft, vandalism and street violence. The results of the Police Label Scheme in the Netherlands were impressive: the risk of burglary to dwellings certified by the label was reduced by 98% compared to non-certified dwellings and the scheme also significantly reduced fear of crime. Important benefits of the tools are that they generally led to increased partnership working, an increased awareness of problems, agreement on priorities and possible solutions, and a commitment to the solutions.

Transferability is an important factor when evaluating these tools. Both the COPS and Kids and Space schemes have a high degree of transferability. The German schemes are thorough but regionally based, and so their transferability is restricted. It would be extremely useful for new EU Member States to adopt some of the easy to use tools, such as COPS and Visual Inspection, as these are not only the simplest tools, but also those closest to standardisation.

In conclusion, this project resulted in a collection of useful tools being assembled. The lessons learned would be of interest to all of those involved in crime reduction, but would be particularly beneficial to new EU Member States in developing countries. However, further work is needed to develop the tools and trial them in a wide variety of settings to achieve standardisation, conduct cost/benefit analyses and examine other countries' experiences.

Full details of the project are provided in the European COPS report, which includes a CD-Rom and a wealth of supporting material, such as colour pictures of case studies from all over Europe, papers, presentations, etc. It is available from www.brebookshop.com; telephone: +44 (0)1923 664761.

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'A COPS report highlights the deficiencies of a street in terms of crime generators and provides a set of recommendations on what needs to be achieved...'

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