

EDUCATION IN DESIGNING OUT CRIME - A CASE STUDY

Dr Paul M. Cozens¹

Abstract

The State's Designing Out Crime Strategy (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007) is committed to reducing opportunities for crime and the fear of crime using Designing Out Crime principles and strategies. One of its five goals is to increase / disseminate understanding of Designing Out Crime.

This phenomenological case study discusses the development of Designing Out Crime education within Curtin University of Technology's Urban and Regional Planning Department and the dissemination of Designing Out Crime ideas to planning students. Insights on students' knowledge and interest in Designing Out Crime were gathered from a series of urban and regional planning field trips, lectures to students from product design, interior architecture, architecture, urban design and urban and regional planning and the supervision of numerous undergraduate planning dissertations on Designing Out Crime. Along with ongoing research into the Designing Out Crime field, insights from this research and teaching experiences are being synthesised to develop more critical teaching programs for Designing Out Crime. The knowledge is currently being formulated into a textbook, which will form the basis for a Special Projects Unit, representing an elective unit for undergraduate students in Urban and Regional Planning.

Keywords: designing out crime, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), education, teaching, research, urban and regional planning.

¹ Research Fellow, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Curtin University of Technology, Perth Western Australia, p.cozens@curtin.edu.au.

INTRODUCTION

The State's Designing Out Crime Strategy (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007) is committed to reducing opportunities for crime and the fear of crime using Designing Out Crime principles and strategies. One of its five goals is to increase understanding of Designing Out Crime. This case study approach traces the development of Designing Out Crime education within Curtin University of Technology's Urban and Regional Planning Department and the dissemination of Designing Out Crime ideas to planning students.

Insights on students' knowledge and interest in Designing Out Crime were gathered from a series of urban and regional planning field trips and guest lectures to students from product design, interior architecture, architecture, urban design and urban and regional planning. Furthermore, insights were gathered from the supervision of several undergraduate planning dissertations on Designing Out Crime to contribute towards the continuing development of teaching units on Designing Out Crime. Along with ongoing research into the Designing Out Crime field, insights from both this research and teaching experiences are being synthesised and formulated into a forthcoming textbook and Special Projects Unit, as an elective for undergraduate students in Urban and Regional Planning.

The Criminal Justice System (CJS) is clearly essential for maintaining social control. However, it has largely proven to be ineffective in operation and principally reactive in nature. Managing crime is no longer the sole responsibility of police and the CJS and that architects, planners, designers, businesses and the community can all assist in reducing crime and enhancing community safety (OCP, 2007). Reducing opportunities for crime and the fear of crime in urban spaces can therefore contribute towards the creation and maintenance of safer, vibrant and more sustainable communities. Indeed, there is a growing body of research which links urban sustainability with crime (Du Plessis, 1999; Cozens *et al*, 1999; Cozens, 2002; Knights *et al.*, 2002; Dewberry, 2003; Armitage, 2007; Cozens, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a) and it is now widely recognized that sustainable communities must therefore possess low levels of both crime and the fear of crime.

DESIGNING OUT CRIME

Designing Out Crime is also known as crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and asserts 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" (Crowe, 2000, p. 46). It draws on the disciplines of criminology, planning, public health and environmental psychology and is a multi-disciplinary approach, located within the field of environmental criminology (for a review see Cozens *et al.*, 2005; Cozens, 2008b).

Over the last 50 years, range of authors have popularised the idea that urban design could influence criminality (Lynch, 1960; Jacobs, 1961; Angel, 1968; Jeffery, 1971; Newman, 1973; and Brantingham and Brantingham, 1975, 1981). The spatial distribution of crime throughout the city is not random and some locations experience a disproportionate level of crime and fear of crime. These 'hot spots' have received increasing attention in recent years (e.g. Nasar and Fisher, 1993) and the potential impact of crime and fear of crime on our cities and our communities therefore "deserve[s] the full attention of planners" (DeFrances and Titus, 1993, p190).

The origins of Designing Out Crime can be traced to Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Oscar Newman's *Defensible Space, People and Design in the Violent City* (Newman, 1973) where 'defensible space' is defined as: "...a surrogate term for the range of mechanisms; real and symbolic barriers, strongly-defined areas of influence, and improved opportunities for surveillance that combine to bring an environment under the control of its residents" (Newman, 1973, p2). The design of the urban space can therefore reduce opportunities for crime by promoting opportunities for surveillance and a sense of ownership by enhancing intervisibility between buildings using street layouts and building orientation. It also focuses on defining spaces using barriers (real and symbolic) and can include improvements to building security, fencing, surface treatments, foliage management and lighting levels. The management of the built environment is also crucial to these ideas and neglected and poorly-managed spaces can transmit the message that citizens do not care about their environment and that offending is more acceptable. Indeed, vacant and derelict properties are associated with crime (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Ross and Mirowsky, 1999) and poorly managed and stigmatized areas are often more likely to be targeted by offenders and less likely to be defended by residents. The 'Broken Windows' theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) argues that the failure to repair a single broken window in a building can result in more vandalism and an escalation of crime problems due to a perceived lack of social control. The maintenance of urban space via the rapid repair of vandalism and removal of graffiti are basic examples of this element to designing out crime (for a detailed review of CPTED see Cozens, 2008b).

In the UK, architectural liaison officers (ALOs) and crime prevention design advisors (CPDAs) within the police service, provide Designing Out Crime advice on the development of Secure By Design (SBD) housing. SBD is defined by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, 1999, p1) as: "a police initiative to encourage the industry to adopt crime prevention measures in development design to assist in reducing the opportunity for crime and the fear of crime, creating a safer and more secure environment". It focuses on physical security issues such as minimum standards for doors, windows and locks as well as relating to new housing it also addresses the local environment and the application of 'defensible space' initiatives (for a detailed review see Cozens *et al.*, 2004 and Armitage and Monchuk, 2010).

Crucially, in some local governments, ALOs / CPDAs work within the development approval process alongside planners and provide Designing Out Crime advice at the development stage. Research suggests SBD is associated with significant reductions in both levels of crime and fear of crime (Armitage, 2000; Brown, 1999; Pascoe, 1999).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In Western Australia, the police are not usually, routinely involved in the planning and develop process. In contrast to the UK, this raises the question as to who / what organization is providing Designing Out Crime advice and expertise in the planning and development approval process in WA?

The State Community Safety and Crime Prevention Strategy, *Preventing Crime* (OCP, 2004) outlines five goals to improve community safety. These include;

1. Supporting families, children and young people;

2. Strengthening communities and revitalizing neighbourhoods;
3. Targeting priority offences;
4. Reducing repeat offending; and
5. Designing out crime and using technology.

More specifically, the State's Designing Out Crime Strategy "is government policy, the cornerstone of which is to apply the principles universally" (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007, p17). The Strategy demonstrates how goals 2 and 5 can be achieved and it is directed at reducing opportunities for crime within the built environment and against people's possessions. The Strategy was endorsed by government in October 2007 and has five key goals (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007):

1. To embed Designing Out Crime principles within all relevant State and local planning policies.
2. To manage the built and landscaped environment to reduce crime.
3. To increase understanding of Designing Out Crime.
4. To apply Designing Out Crime principles in a multi-agency approach.
5. To use product design and appropriate technologies to reduce crime.

Specifically, the objective of Goal 3 is "to increase the knowledge, awareness and understanding of Designing Out Crime through the provision of training, education and marketing" (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007, p17).

A range of key performance indicators have been established for evaluating the effectiveness of the Designing Out Crime Strategy. However, the Strategy also highlights 'secondary' indicators such as "the scale and extent of realignment of relevant university degree courses to include Designing Out Crime principles" (OCP, 2007, p29).

The knowledge and application of CPTED in WA is being promoted and supported by the State Government in the form of the Designing Out Crime Strategy (Office of Crime Prevention, 2007), the Designing Out Crime Planning Guidelines (WAPC, 2006a) and the Designing Out Crime Planning Bulletin No. 79 (WAPC, 2006b). However, although a basic two-day course has been developed by the OCP and attended by over three hundred local government employees, it is suggested that many of WA's currently practising planners have only a limited understanding of Designing Out Crime. Furthermore, a 2-day course is obviously limited in scope and content. Crucially, planners who will qualify in the future are also likely to have had only a limited exposure to Designing Out Crime and environmental criminology. Indeed, research indicates that certain types of crime are concentrated in certain locations and at certain times which challenge assumptions about community safety that are commonly held within planning and urban design (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993; Kinney *et al.*, 2008; Cozens, 2009; Cozens, 2010). Contrary to the assumption that promoting Jacobs' 'eyes on the street' will always reduce crime and enhance community safety, specific land-uses in busy urban spaces can represent crime generators, crime attractors and crime detractors (Kinney *et al.*, 2008; Cozens, 2009) since they provide increased opportunities for crime. Similarly, planning policies, which unreservedly promote permeable streets, have been recently challenged (Cozens, 2008c; Cozens and Love, 2009; Cozens, 2010) and the

evidence from environmental criminology indicates overwhelmingly, that higher levels of permeability are associated with increased opportunities for crime.

Across WA's universities Designing Out Crime is currently taught at a very limited scale generally as a minor element to degrees in criminology, planning and urban design. It is suggested that the evidence from environmental criminology is not widely known to planners or many practitioners of Designing Out Crime (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1998; Cozens, 2009). Indeed, Brantingham and Brantingham (1998, p 53) claim "proactive crime prevention calls for the active movement of environmental criminologists into the development of more directed models for use in urban planning and then into a knowledge transfer role".

EMBEDDING DESIGNING OUT CRIME IN PLANNING EDUCATION

This paper adopts a phenomenological perspective and discusses action research exploring the experiences and reflections of the author relating to research in the field and on teaching Designing Out Crime at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Although case studies are often assumed to be largely exploratory, Yin (2009) argues that they can also be descriptive, explanatory (Yin, 1984) and generalizable. The case study research adopted in this paper is largely exploratory and descriptive in nature. As background, some of the activities involved in teaching Designing Out Crime since 2006 are presented.

As a member of Curtin University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) since 2006, the author has delivered guest lectures to students of urban and regional planning, urban design, architecture, interior architecture and product design. Additionally, guest lectures and discussions on Designing Out Crime were undertaken on urban and regional planning field trips to Exmouth, Geraldton and Bunbury. Notably, these relatively new ideas have generally been enthusiastically embraced by the planning students. Designing Out Crime has, to some extent, been received as a 'sexy' and exciting 'new' topic for students to consider and research further.

The teaching model for Designing Out Crime is based on an understanding of the key concepts, theories and issues as well as insights from environmental criminology, and particularly opportunity theories. This model seeks to transcend traditional Designing Out Crime teaching and move beyond the dissemination of a simplistic understandings surveillance, territoriality and image – to embrace the broader theories and evidence from environmental criminology (which many Design Out Crime 'experts' are unaware of). In particular, students are instructed on the evidence about what types of land-uses (and times of the day) are more vulnerable to higher concentrations of crime than others and how routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979) might explain these 'pulses in crime'. Failure to consider the theories and evidence from environmental criminology before applying Design Out Crime initiatives is completely inappropriate – and is similar to a doctor prescribing medicine (treatments) without analysing or understanding the specific illness (diagnosis) of an individual patient (Cozens, 2009). Furthermore, it is also highly unlikely to be effective.

With this research in mind, the author is currently developing an undergraduate unit for the planning degree, which will provide students with the option of undertaking a course entitled called Special Topics in Urban and Regional Planning. This can focus on

Designing Out Crime and will represent an extensive unit taught over one semester, which will be offered as an elective. It will provide the opportunity for students to conduct practical research in Designing Out Crime – and reflects widespread calls by students for some formalized teaching of Designing Out Crime within the Urban and Regional Planning degree. To inform the development of this unit and to provide insights into understanding at undergraduate level, the content of recent planning dissertations on Designing Out Crime was also reviewed. Feedback from teaching Designing Out Crime was also included in the development of this unit. It is suggested that this approach is useful to elicit insights into how undergraduate planning students think about Designing Out Crime and what are the common areas of interest, methodologies, themes, misconceptions, pitfalls and findings.

The author is due to publish a book on Designing Out Crime in 2010, which will provide the basis for the content of the Special Topics in Urban and Regional Planning Unit. The publication draws on recent research (Cozens 2007b; Kinney *et al.*, 2008; Cozens, 2008c; Cozens, 2009; Cozens and Love, 2009), teaching experiences and discusses and analyses current and historical developments in the research, policy and practice of Designing Out Crime. It also integrates the theories and evidence from environmental criminology in a practical approach, which extends beyond traditional and simplistic 'cookbook' approaches. Several enquiries and discussions about Designing Out Crime research possibilities are also ongoing at Master's and PhD level and are likely to be progressed in 2010.

Recently (May, 2009) students participated in a Design Out Crime discussion Forum at Curtin University. Speakers from WA Police and the City of Perth planning department discussed Designing Out Crime issues in the cities of Perth and Mandurah. A planning student also had the opportunity to present their planning dissertation topic – on the lack of land-use diversity in the night-time economy of Northbridge. The author also delivered a talk on the city as an ecosystem of crime opportunities and how crime could be considered as form of pollution and an externality of economic development. Attended by thirty or so students, this Designing Out Crime forum stimulated much interest, which has also overflowed into other urban and regional planning units, such as Urban Analysis. Students had the opportunity to measure and analyze urban space, and many have adopted crime within this practical learning framework. It enabled student to analyze how urban space might function – as well as how it might be dysfunctional and unwittingly promote opportunities for crime.

The author was also invited to participate as a judge at the 2009 Designing Out Crime Winter School project held at University of Technology Sydney. Organized by the Designing Out Crime Research Centre, an intensive 3-week program was undertaken by 200 design students working in teams on Designing Out Crime projects. These were developed by researchers in conjunction with real world 'clients', such as local governments, public transport operators, retailers and social housing agencies.

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

There are a range of insights and observations, which can be drawn from this phenomenological case study, including:

- Students commonly assume crime data is both available and reliable for their investigations / hypotheses;
- All dissertations begin with a focus that is too broad and with grand intentions for solving massive complex problems, rather than manageable 'doable' research projects;
- Planning students and the planning discipline generally, support the assumption that 'eyes on the street' always works to reduce crime, when research suggests this may not be the case;
- There is limited knowledge of opportunity theories from environmental criminology, which underpin Designing Out Crime. There is limited knowledge of environmental criminology and research specifically on permeability, mixed-use development and high density living by planning students and in the discipline of planning and other built environment fields. This effectively means Designing Out Crime is considered as a solution (treatment) - but little crime risk analysis (diagnosis) of problems takes place;
- There is often an assumption that Designing Out Crime always works and has no limitations / shortcomings. There is little knowledge or appreciation of the circumstances and contexts where Designing Out Crime might work less effectively (e.g. when 'defensible space can become 'undefended', 'offensible' and 'indefensible space');
- Planning dissertation student often make causal links without the consideration for the potential effect of a range of other factors;
- There is growing enthusiasm and passion for DOC in students of planning and other disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS

Significantly, Thompson and McCue (2008, p9) state; "a safe environment is the foundation of a healthy city" and that CPTED is a useful tool for promoting health and active living principles". However, reflection on the empirical research and on recent teaching experiences indicates that the current understanding of DOC within planning is commonly overly simplistic and partial.

The forthcoming publication of a DOC text in 2010 has been informed by research, evidence from field studies and experiences in teaching. It goes beyond the 'cookbook approach' and focuses more extensively on research from the field of environmental criminology. Crucially, the approach considers how to operationalism DOC as process, not as an outcome. A unit entitled 'Special Projects in Urban and Regional Planning' is under development as an 'elective' for a growing number of interested students and several MAs and PhD projects in DOC are also being discussed.

It is argued that this case study has provided valuable insights into the current knowledge of DOC in planning and in undergraduate planning students, which continue to inform the development of DOC education.

In summary, this case study suggests that DOC is far more complex than using simple 'checklist' approaches and that DOC is a process whereby currently, the diagnosis of crime problems (risk assessment) is NOT commonly undertaken. There remain also, several dichotomies within common interpretations of DOC, which are unhelpful and myopic. For example the cul-de-sac versus grid, the mixed-use versus single use development and the high density versus low-density debates are overly simplistic. Research clearly indicates that the local context should always guide the use of planning principles not the application of generic formulaic designs. Furthermore, an over reliance on the assumption that 'eyes on the street' will always 'save the day' permeates ideas of safety from crime within the planning profession.

Indeed, Schneider and Kitchen (2007, p233) argue: "If planning is about making places better for people, then it has to address those elements that make places problematic for people, and crime and the fear of crime are high up this list". Furthermore, they suggest "most planning proceeds with little knowledge of crime patterns, crime attractors, crime generators, the importance of edges, paths and nodes or the site specific solutions that facilitate or even encourage crime" (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1998, p53).

The development of education in DOC, based on empirical research and on teaching experiences will undoubtedly contribute to redressing these shortcomings and ultimately assist in the creation of more liveable and sustainable urban environments.

3,230 words

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