

European
Forum *for*
Urban
Security

Spatial Interventions

Fixing the *Broken Windows*:
Empowering the Community



● Key Words:

#spatial interventions

#regeneration of public spaces

#crime prevention through environmental design

#target hardening

According to the well-known *broken windows* theory, visible indicators of crime and incivilities instil fear in a community. This theory is based on the assumption that the physical landscape affects people's feelings of security and wellbeing. Thus, *broken windows* in a neighbourhood can be perceived as a sign of the community's defencelessness and vulnerability, as well as suggesting a lack of social cohesion. Likewise, the opposite is true. In neighbourhoods where residents have a strong sense of social cohesion, these *broken windows* are fixed - both literally and metaphorically - offering residents a sense of control and reinforcing their sense of belonging.

This theory was particularly influential in shaping policies in the 1990s, although today it is not expressly employed as a means of managing crime in major cities. However, it is still used as a method for lowering infractions and maintaining social order. With this fact in mind, the **BeSecure-FeelSecure (BSFS) project** (2019-2023) implemented several spatial interventions in the City of Piraeus (GR), including target hardening, public space regeneration-beautification initiatives, and restored playgrounds.

● Target hardening

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Target hardening is the measure of strengthening security by increasing the level of effort required to commit a crime on a target or object. In Piraeus, fencing was reinforced in 3 of the school facilities in one of the districts.



● Regeneration-beautification of a public space

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removing graffiti, covering surfaces with anti-graffiti paint, and renovating the vandalised or destroyed facades of some schools.



● Restored playgrounds



fencing playgrounds, restoring their flooring, and installing colourful and welcoming new equipment, with the aim of enhancing the well-being of those using and visiting the playgrounds and thus enhancing their feeling of security.



Before ●



● After

● Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

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The *broken windows* theory goes hand in hand with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

“Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a multi-disciplinary approach of crime prevention that uses urban and architectural design and the management of built and natural environments. CPTED strategies aim to reduce victimisation, deter offender decisions that precede criminal acts, and build a sense of community among inhabitants so they can gain territorial control of areas, reduce crime, and minimise the fear of crime.”

[The International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Association](#)

In short, CPTED refers to the theory that built environments – when tailored in a certain way – reduce crime and fear of crime.

Consider the following examples: if the landscape is well-kept and not overgrown, the area is more visible and allows residents to keep their “eyes on the street”. When this is done, crime is less likely to occur. Alternatively, imagine a neighbourhood in which undesired graffiti is promptly removed. Keeping an area well-maintained indicates that it is well-cared for and that negative activity will not be tolerated. These are just a few examples of what preventing crime by design can mean.

However, as with everything, security by design has its pros and cons. Research has shown that, if its principles are applied proportionately, it has the potential to reduce crime. However, if misused, it can create hostile environments, displace crime, or create locations that exclude certain groups of people. Such examples include placing metal spikes outside buildings to deter homeless people from sleeping there, or metal studs and bolts to break up smooth surfaces and discourage skateboarders.

Here is a recap of the pros and risks of **CPTED**:

PROS

- Plays a role in community crime prevention
- Immediate impact
- Reduces spending on policing and other judicial matters
- Tested and proven impact
- If incorporated in the original design phase of facility planning, CPTED security principles are often cheaper than traditional approaches

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

- May result in crime displacement
- May increase vigilantism
- Inability to adapt to behavioural change
- Retrofitting an existing environment to meet CPTED can sometimes be costly

● Points to note and Recommendations

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● Other European practices

Efus' Approach

In its *Security, Democracy and Cities Manifesto*, Efus notes that, ‘numerous studies and experiments have shown that the design and management of public spaces have an impact on security and feelings of insecurity’. It recommends considering the various ways in which public spaces are used based on objective and subjective data, involving the public to co-produce security policies, and maintaining a healthy balance between the use of security technologies and the respect of fundamental rights.

Based on its long-standing work on these issues, Efus formulated the following recommendations and guiding principles:

- The planning, management and animation of public spaces have an impact on safety and feelings of insecurity.
- A well-designed public space is one which suits the multiple needs of daily and occasional users.
- Cities play a central role in fostering a shared culture of security in the public sphere.
- Solutions should produce security effectively whilst respecting the standards of an open society and achieving a balance between human presence and technology.
- Security and respect for fundamental rights are not contradictory objectives, but rather coherent and complementary.

● The New European Bauhaus Initiative

In line with their aim of creating visually delightful, inclusive and sustainable public spaces, the European Union launched the New European Bauhaus Initiative in 2020.

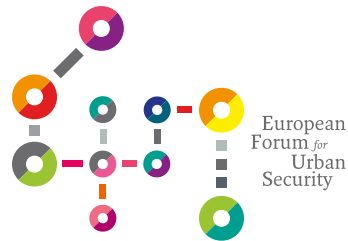
This initiative encourages European citizens to imagine and build together a “*sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls, dedicating a central role to local and regional authorities. Beautiful are the places, practices, and experiences which are:*

- *Enriching, inspired by art and culture, responding to needs beyond functionality.*
- *Sustainable, in harmony with nature, the environment, and our planet.*
- *Inclusive, encouraging a dialogue across cultures, disciplines, genders and ages.”¹*

¹New European Bauhaus: https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

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Project Partners



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