EUROPEAN CITIES: INNOVATING FOR SAFE PUBLIC SPACES

By Edna Peza-Ramírez
edna.peza@gmail.com

Architect-urbanist, Université de Paris
Fondation Palladio PhD Fellow 2018-2019
Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellow

Urban security is a central element of urban sustainability in Europe. Throughout the years, European programs and agreements have been put into place to address security as a basic right for citizens and to protect it. Moreover, in recent years, the roles of public spaces, social aspects, and city-scale policies have been re-evaluated as necessary to provide safety for all.

Public spaces are the embodiment of the relationship between citizens and their cities, of social cohesion. However, they frequently become the setting in which social tensions are exteriorized. In European cities these tensions arise from disparity, and inequality related to unemployment. Anxiety generated from these situations undermines confidence in the future.

Europe tends to become fragmented and to withdraw into individualistic positions, weakening the social fabric and threatening social cohesion and solidarity. In different countries, people are more conscious about risks, including those linked to criminality and victimization -intimidation, aggression, thefts, incivilities. Growing feelings of insecurity make people modify their lifestyles or daily routines.

SECURITY, A PUBLIC GOOD

What does this mean for European cities and public spaces? It is a shared responsibility among public and private actors, but cities have an important role to play that needs further recognition.

- Cities are the closest to the citizens. They have the capacity to allocate diverse resources to implement prevention, sanction, and solidarity policies, and apply expertise to solve everyday problems -and eventually, evaluate the results and the reasons behind them.
- Although it is frequently seen as a macro subject, action on a local level is paramount to better address issues of insecurity through an integrated approach. It is only when looking at cities rather than regions or countries that the effectivity of such problems and solutions can be assessed.

PACIFIC COEXISTENCE

Urban security ought to be a public good, based on the respect of fundamental rights, to be guaranteed in both public and private spaces, and guaranteed for both individuals and groups. It is a public good, based on the respect of fundamental rights, to be guaranteed in both public and private spaces, and guaranteed for both individuals and groups. It is a shared responsibility among public and private actors, but cities have an important role to play that needs further recognition.

---

1 This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 665850.

This article was originally published in French in IEIF, Réflexions Immobilières No. 91.
complex security that goes further than police and surveillance cameras, that requires a wide-reaching partnership of actors and disciplines to evolve further from the traditional - and rather hostile- “urbanisme sécuritaire”. An urbanism with a focus on security that excludes and alienates.

Public spaces have the potential of becoming a tool for peaceful coexistence: they are a place for meeting, for mediation, for cultural exchange, for coexistence. Public spaces of European cities are shared by diverse population groups. By integrating the social element, contemporary prevention policies shift from alienating citizens to the creation of shared spaces where these diverse populations are safe and included.

**EUROPEAN INITIATIVES**

What are the European initiatives that deal with urban space and security issues? The first conference on the subject of “Local Strategies for reducing insecurity in Europe” took place in 1989 and it was organized by the European Council. Years later, the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), an institution specializing on the creation of norms, a specialized organization in the development of norms and standards, established an international working group on the subject of crime prevention through urban planning and building design in the late 90s.

Involving the participation of Denmark, United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, this working group mixed perspectives from building engineering, architecture, and urban planning. Previously, the CEN had put forward very specific norms on bullet resistance of doors and windows, alarm systems, use of glass in buildings, storage, etc.

But the goal of this project for standardization was to focus on how urban planners, builders, and architects could contribute to reduce fear of crime and incidents on concrete situations alongside residents, police, and public and private actors.

**CRIME PREVENTION**

The CEN issued the “Standards for designing out crime in Europe” pre-norm ENV 14383-2 in 2003. The application of such norms is not obligatory, and it is complicated due to the heterogeneity of both urban planning practices and the socio-spatial configuration of European cities. It was superseded in 2007 by the Technical Report 14383.

This report was the reference for the production of a handbook titled “Planning Urban Design and Management for Crime Prevention”. Published in 2007, this manual was done by the Agis – Action SAFEPOLIS project, a partnership between the DIAP laboratory for Urban Quality and Safety from the Politecnico di Milano, the IAU Ile de France, and the Regione Emilia Romagna in Italy. Contrary to all the manuals present in Europe and America, it proposes a management model.

*Manifesto of Aubervilliers and Saint-Denis.* There are several important actions that have been taken by the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS). The Forum, founded in 1987 with support from the European Council, is a network of local and regional authorities from 16 countries dedicated to urban
security. It has led projects on to fight against organized crime, radicalization, youth violence, crime prevention, justice and safety in cities, among others.

In 2013 they produced the Manifesto of Aubervilliers and Saint-Denis. It is a political platform on urban security which continues with principles and practical recommendations established in previous work with European cities in 2009. It also presents a future plan of action for local authorities.

Regarding public spaces, the manifesto calls on local authorities to:

- involve citizens in design and management;
- foster dialogue between users, managers, and designers;
- promote peaceful coexistence that contributes to social cohesion; avoid privatization of public space and exclusion;
- consider the different uses for night and day;
- address gender issues;
- train stakeholders on to include the know-how in the quality criteria of public spaces.

These recommendations were further elaborated in the subsequent manifesto “Security, Democracy, and Cities – Co-producing urban security policies” published in 2017.

**Pact of Amsterdam.** A year before, the Urban Agenda for the European Union was launched with the Pact of Amsterdam. It promotes a new method for working and cooperation between Member States, cities, the European Commission, and other stakeholders at different levels to stimulate growth, livability, and innovation in cities, and to identify and address social challenges. It focuses on three pillars of EU policy-making and implementation of solutions: better regulation, better funding, and better knowledge. On a larger scope, it also seeks to contribute on a European level to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on the 11th goal: “make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable” and the global New Urban Agenda as part of the Habitat III process.

**Partnerships.** In this sense, partnerships are the main mechanisms that ensure focus and real impact, they help develop in an open and transparent fashion a multi-level and cross-sectoral approach to governance.

- One of these partnerships was launched in Paris in January 2019 to address security in public spaces coordinated by the city of Nice and the EFUS. The Security in Public Spaces Partnership states three priorities: urban planning and design to create safer cities, technologies for smart and safe cities, and managing security and sharing public space.
- The goal of furthering the understanding of what makes societies safe is one of the challenges that European research seeks to fulfil. It is also of importance to seek, implement, and evaluate solutions that focus on crime prevention and public spaces in European cities. An exchange of these bodies of knowledge and lessons learned through experience would be beneficial for innovative policy making at different levels.

**Tackling insecurity and public space**

Several factors contribute to insecurity in cities, such as economic conditions and social problems. However, the built environment has an impact on insecurity. The organization and functioning of

---

public spaces can have an impact on security: they can make them safer, but an incorrect organization can make them more dangerous.

From “prevention situationnelle”... Why are some types of crime more recurrent in certain zones than others? Environmental factors can contribute to a criminal act taking place, such as lighting, obstacles, street dimensions, presence or absence of people, walkability. As previously stated, cities are closest to the citizens and can track the effectivity of policies aimed to improve security, and public spaces in particular can become an important tool to foster security. Thus, modifying the built environment can potentially contribute to better security.

In France, the “prevention situationnelle” or “situational crime prevention” is used in this perspective, a term originally coined by Ronald Clarke in the early 1980s in Great Britain. It is defined as an alternative to penal policy: non-penal interventions to make it more difficult, riskier or less profitable to commit a criminal act by changing the specific circumstances in which a type of crime is (or could be) committed.

...to the “urbanisme sécuritaire”. In this context, one can find it referenced in French legal documents concerning police action focused on the criminal. When paired with urban planning, it is presented as a set of codified solutions, with target hardening and the strategic localization of elements for this purpose: physical barriers to protect targets, control access, keep potential offenders away from targets, make targets less attractive or less profitable, prevent access to and use of objects to commit crimes, etc.

We see here a proliferation of CCTV, alarms, metal detectors, bollards. Due to the strong emphasis on patrolling and police intervention as the main action against crime, it devolves into a security-oriented urbanism focusing on reaction -acting when the criminal is potentially on the move.

It is considered by many as a practical knowledge, simplistic, and “atheoretical”. According to Bilel Benbouzid, it has been criticized for ignoring the body of criminological research that shows that the root causes of delinquency stem from a deficit at various levels: social, cultural and economic disparities, among others.

Considering social factors. Building upon the works of Ronald Clarke -both on the fields of research and professional experiences in Great Britain-, and the works of Jane Jacobs, Schlomo Angel and Elizabeth Wood, emerges the notion of “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)”. CPTED is an approach that proposes the modification of elements of the urban context (streets, parks, lighting, stations, etc.) to inhibit the commission of crimes, through dissuasive practices and the redesign of public spaces.

---

In “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: Applications of Architectural Design and Space Management Concepts”, Timothy D. Crowe offers the following definition of this methodology:

“The proper design and effective use of the built environment, that can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime and an improvement in the quality of life. ...The goal of CPTED is to reduce opportunities for crime that may be inherent in the design of structures or in the design of neighborhoods.” At first glance, one would say that this definition doesn’t change much from that of “situationist crime prevention.” However, C. Ray Jeffrey, who first coined the concept of CPTED in 1971 enunciates a differentiating element -the social factors. He notes that environment can affect criminal behaviour -and behaviour in general- in two ways: physically, by providing the spatial elements to which individuals respond; socially, by providing the social relationships to which individuals respond. The most negative physical characteristics of the urban environment are noise, pollution and overcrowding. The social characteristics are isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and dehumanization.

Three-action strategy. In the following years, this methodology was developed by researchers, professionals, and public authorities in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada, to integrate criminology, sociology, architecture, and urban planning in a fight against crime. It was further developed by integrating -and criticizing- works from Oscar Newman, and James Q. Wilson et George L. Kelling.

---

Crowe, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, 46.
Jeffery, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.
Certainly, it would be ambitious -and ultimately, an oversimplification- to say that urban forms themselves can solve insecurity problems. Security is no longer an issue to be understood exclusively in terms of criminology and policing.

- Recent evidence from both researchers and practitioners in cities around the world suggests that an effective strategy comprises three approaches: the application of the law, social prevention, and environmental prevention.
- During the past two decades, CPTED practice and research have been concerned with the integration of social and structural aspects of prevention into the application of this methodology on public spaces. In this sense, the antithesis of insecurity is not security but inclusion.
- At the beginning of 2000s, Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union officially recognized CPTED as a useful, concrete, and effective approach to reduce crime and feelings of insecurity.\(^7\)

**ACTION AT CITY LEVEL**

It is important, however, to clearly state that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Understanding and adapting methodologies is important to effectively prevent crime and foster social cohesion. Findings show that implementation is best achieved at a local level -cities- using methods and procedures tailored to the specific context.\(^8\)

European cities and their public spaces have the potential to become a laboratory for urban and social innovation on crime prevention. The diversity of urban culture, urban policies, and crime problems across Europe promise to provide blueprints and good practice for a wide range of countries across the globe, thus taking a leadership in the development and implementation of crime prevention through urban design.\(^9\)

Policing and surveillance are just a part of the proposed short-term solutions since they don’t address the roots of the problem of insecurity. Social issues such as poverty, inclusion, inequality, are at the core, and thus, require to be considered by policy-makers and stakeholders if security is to be improved for all sectors of the population, particularly for those in more vulnerable situations. This is the difference between strategies based on reaction and police and those focusing on prevention at a social level. For sustainable security, a transversal interdisciplinary course of action is required to avoid such situations to arise and to mediate them in other ways.

---

\(^7\) Laboratorio Qualità Urbana e Sicurezza and Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme de la Région d’Ile de France, “Planning Urban Design and Management for Crime Prevention,” 5.

\(^8\) Davey and Wootton, “Integrating Crime Prevention into Urban Design and Planning,” 2.