

23 Responding to crime and fear in public places

Towards an agenda for research and practice

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23.1 Introduction

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
(United Nations, 2019)

Safety and security are an important part of social sustainability. A safe environment enables the most basic human needs: safe housing and a safe urban environment that allows free movement for everyone. This is clear from the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015.

23.2 Responding to crime and fear in public places

The discussion that follows is not meant to be a summary of the suggestions deriving from the chapters but rather a critical reflection of the recommendations they present. Some suggest minor changes and adjustments to public environments, while others demand long-term investment or changes in people's attitudes, changes traditions within organizations and society as a whole.

Research

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies can provide useful guidelines for interventions, as illustrated in Chapter 2. However, further research is needed to evaluate whether and how individuals' characteristics interact with various environments, be it a park or a bus stop.

Sometimes the context and scale of a particular problem/case play a role in affecting outcomes. It is no surprise when an intervention that worked in big cities does not produce the same results in a rural community. In addition, the vast majority of studies are developed in North America and Europe, so there is a need for further research that can check to what extent current theories and practices of interventions fit public places in Global South contexts. Equally

important is to illustrate how Global South contexts can be informative and help interpret the safety dynamics found elsewhere.

One of the future research areas is the need to better understand why certain types of public places become a crime magnet and others do not; namely, why they become risky places that concentrate crime. The temporal and spatial contexts of these public places are important aspects to be further considered using real-time data and new ways of depicting public places using real-time streaming and other records, as illustrated in Chapter 17.

Another area that remains open for further research is the relationship between the use of spaces by different users and the well-known mismatches between the design of places and safety perceptions in multifunctional public places. In particular, the possibility of tailoring safety interventions that tackle fear of particular groups of users is an important task in urban planning. More research should be carried out on the importance of social interaction and its effect as a mediator of crime.

“The whole journey approach” to safety is fundamental in the context of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda and its goals for sustainable development. Women and other riders with special safety needs feel less safe than other riders while in public transit. The elderly report feeling more fear than the rest of the population. LGBTQI status and disability also affect safety. Only when we focus on safety patterns over time and space will we be able to tackle safe travel from door to door. In particular, sexual crimes against women in transit environments represent a rather invisible problem and demand more attention both in research and practice. In addition, it is also important to investigate the role of municipalities and other local actors in supporting people’s mobility and safety needs, for instance, in old age.

More knowledge is needed about the nature of crime and safety in public places that are privately owned, such as shopping malls or stadiums. Issues of public conduct (what is allowed or isn’t in terms of behavior in public places) is at the core when safety is assessed. Surveillance and questions of integrity are also relevant in semi-public places such as shopping centers. This raises questions about who is accountable for or responsible in case “something happens”. If safety is commodified, for whom is it intended in these semi-public places? Knowledge is lacking in the international discourse about safety in semi-public places, such as retail environments. There is a lack of evidence-based research on crime and its prevention in these semi-public places, especially knowledge about environments and the situational conditions of these crimes. We first need to understand what safety conditions look like, define interventions and assess what works and what does not work. The debate must also involve issues of accountability among relevant actors.

Future research should also focus on the “unexpected results” (for instance, lighting is related to both increases and decreases in crime in one place) and how training of staff affects the outcome of safety interventions.

Digitalization, “big data” and new technologies have the potential to change the way a public place is managed and to improve our safety. Yet, policies and practices are slow to respond to these developments. Safety challenges vary across the city and affect different groups of people in different ways. Despite a fairly good knowledge of factors that affect safety, there is often a gap between the knowledge gained in research and what is applied to practical use, due to various obstacles to this knowledge being put into practice. We need to further develop groundbreaking methodologies to best translate and transfer scientific knowledge to practical action (Laub, 2011) and, at the same time, help academics learn from other experts. Until now, the knowledge that is needed in this area has been limited to universities and research institutes. This requires a process that engages and is well informed by academics, safety experts, people in the private sector (e.g., in housing companies) and practitioners in different fields in knowledge creation, exchange and diffusion—that reflect different realities, from large metropolitan areas to rural communities. Technology-based and inclusive safety solutions are at the core of this research that welcomes experimental frameworks for inclusive and safe public places.

In summary, the novelty of this future set of research ideas is to consider that risks are unequally distributed in society and, as such, interventions must be tailored to the needs of different groups, to explore innovative methods in empirical research, especially spatial analytical tools in safety research. Reality demands more integrated, holistic and cross-disciplinary theories and methods that are capable of guiding (and dealing with) an ever-increasing volume of space and time data, to develop ways to improve the transfer of knowledge from researchers to practice, and vice versa. The suggestions put forward focus on the topics that were presented in the book but may not be limited to them.

Design

Lighting and maintenance are often highlighted as important components of a safe public place, but these characteristics do not come alone. In all studies, guardianship is another important component of a place’s safety, no matter if it is a park, a station or a musical festival, regardless of crime type. A safe public place also demands people’s involvement in local crime-prevention initiatives, which may also help curb crime and improve safety. A word of caution is necessary, because the evidence is based on studies using different methods and a variety of approaches. In addition, although our sample of articles covers several decades of research, it is biased towards “expected positive results”, in other words, articles that show effects of decreasing crime tend to be published, and those that show no effects or unexpected results are not published.

In addition, improving safety conditions in specific locations by using one strategy only might be ineffective because the urban environment does not affect all individuals equally. It is important to consider the mixture, or intersection, of activities, the social interactions (and their contexts and accompanying characteristics) at a certain point in time that lead a motivated criminal to act

(or that lead us to become a crime victim). From the urban planning perspective, there is vast evidence of a number of factors that can affect both crime and fear of crime that are linked to a particular area, but policies should also be sensitive to the dynamics of temporal patterns of human activity and city contexts.

Crimes are linked to specific environmental conditions, at a particular location and at a specific time, which can be tackled because they are not random events. Different characteristics of the physical environment are important, but their effects vary. This insight has important consequences not only for understanding why crimes occur, where or when, but also how they can be prevented. Therefore, safety intervention needs to adopt a holistic perspective taking into account the interaction between individuals and environments. As suggested by Wikström and Treiber (2017), this can be difficult for crime prevention agencies to influence locally. Therefore, it is important that politicians and policy-makers at national levels focus on improving social conditions and change social rules, to the greatest extent possible, to prevent people's exposure to criminogenic conditions, with a certain emphasis on criminally motivated people. As suggested by these authors, interventions that specifically target environmental characteristics will only be effective in preventing crime if they promote changes in how people perceive crime as an alternative in their specific environment.

The implementation of physical barriers (e.g., gates, fences and walls) must be evaluated beyond their technical effects. The literature overview may indicate some evidence that gated communities reduce crime in unequal societies, but what are the costs for the whole society when buses must take longer trips to accommodate spatially fragmented spaces? What is the impact on the safety of those who are "transit captives"? What is the impact of CCTV cameras on people's privacy and integrity? What is the overall environmental impact when more lights are put on the streets for the sake of reducing crime? How can we prioritize investments by types of sustainability goal? We argue that safety solutions that conflict with overall sustainability goals of equality and inclusiveness need to be assessed more strictly in relation to who is the recipient of a particular solution and the overall impact on society. This applies to major housing solutions such as gated communities or other minor technical features of public places such as lighting or surveillance technologies.

Policy

Architects, planners and safety specialists should expect to have their actions directed towards a safe and sustainable environment supported by the national rules and regulations of construction and planning of their respective countries. In an attempt to direct actions to achieve the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, we should strive for implementation of a system of ongoing, self-evaluating safety guidelines. Equally important is to balance safety principles with other sustainable principles. Breaking down principles for planning and projects for carbon dioxide emissions and other sustainability dimensions should be the next step.

If it is voluntary, as it is now in many countries around the world, safety as an integral part of sustainability is unlikely to be incorporated into practice in the near future. In order to ensure that safety guidelines are put in practice, there is a need to provide a mandate for municipalities and regional bodies to implement safety guidelines with support from the county administrative boards or similar authorities.

These guidelines are intended to be used as a plan to stimulate new knowledge, change processes and promote new ways of implementing planning practices. The importance of the urban environment and people's daily routine activity would be central when creating written guidelines for architects and planners to incorporate safety as part of their daily work. The focus can be on planning and building permits, detailed plans and outline plans for new housing developments, but also on actions that can tackle existing problematic environments in cities. Safety guidelines should be anchored by national building acts and be implemented with the participation of public stakeholders (e.g., universities), from national to local planning levels in a standardized set of processes.

Equally important is to establish evaluation mechanisms for knowledge and methods used when implementing safety guidelines in practice. This should be a self-evaluating process that demands establishment of good cooperation among sectors (e.g., housing, transportation, social care, health) as well as from national to local levels throughout the planning process. In many countries, including countries with a long planning tradition, such as the Nordic countries, the hierarchy in planning systems prevents the introduction of guidelines. In these countries, a municipal planning monopoly means that legally binding physical plans must be approved by the municipalities before being ratified, which means municipalities are key to ensuring that new developments follow these safety guidelines. However, the system is composed of many steps and moved by diverse interests. The perception is that there are major gaps between urban planning, detailed planning, environmental planning and neighborhood planning and the process for building permits and permits for land use. We argue that these gaps and barriers that limit the implementation of safety guidelines must be identified and tackled, taking into account the particularities of each country.

A plan of action for implementing safety guidelines based on the 2030 Goals could include the following standards of practice:

1. Create clear written guidelines for architects, planners and safety experts by embedding safety as part of their daily work. Focus on planning and building permits, detailed plans but also current crime prevention processes and practices.
2. Strengthen the existing interface between academia, governmental authorities, public and private enterprises, police, municipalities, data production agencies, non-governmental organizations.
3. Identify and work against current barriers to cooperation between the municipality and the police and other stakeholders, such as building companies.

4. Improve processes and methods in design alongside target-hardening methods (other than walls, cameras, gates, etc.), taking into account users' perspectives of safety.
5. Create arenas locally and regionally for discussions on current methods, theory and practices in crime prevention practices—"what works" and "what does not work". Which way is desirable? Take the "good examples" in perspective and embrace learning lessons from "failed" initiatives show proven methods and examples for municipalities on how to achieve minimum expected standard levels on these aspects.
6. Facilitate changes in the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards those who are more targeted (potential victims). Apply an inclusive safety agenda, non-gender-neutral and tailored to affect the lives of those who have their mobility impaired because of the safety challenges they face. The intersectionality of safety (e.g., age, gender, disability, sexual status) is expected to become more central than today in the assessment of individuals safety needs.
7. Identify barriers and obstacles regarding implementation of actions that improve users' safety as well as barriers to the use of digitally based mobility products and services that can be suitable for particular groups of travelers with safety needs.
8. Implement methods so the individual (regardless of gender, age, etc.) is involved and can influence the design of public places. It is important to ensure that channels are created so that the "unheard voices" in the planning process are included. Tackling ethnic, socio-economic and geographical segregation through housing and employment policies is a pre-condition for ensuring safety for all.
9. Create educational opportunities where learning about crime and safety guidelines is offered to experts working on crime prevention and safety-enabling measures at municipal and regional levels.
10. Consider issues of crime and safety as public health issues, combine solutions to deal with challenging and unjust environments where people live and spend time. As previously suggested in this chapter, it is important that politicians and policymakers at national levels focus on improving social conditions and change social rules, to the greatest extent possible, to prevent people's exposure to criminogenic conditions.

In conclusion, it is important to make crime and safety a mandatory aspect of national building, land use and construction statutes by defining safety guidelines around the world. "Building in" safety at the beginning of a process of construction is more beneficial than trying to fix safety problems after a public place has become a risky place. Yet, interventions that specifically target environmental characteristics will only be effective in preventing crime if they promote changes in how people perceive crime as an alternative in the specific environment. This process would benefit from training mechanisms for experts and cooperation at local to national levels to realize that

issues of crime and safety are a result of complex interactions between individuals and their environment. It is also necessary to promote training for planners and designers to maximize design options that enable urban safe environments in an inclusive way, considering other perhaps conflicting sustainability goals. More empirical evidence from research to guide planning practice and education is needed. It is vital to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders at local levels, in particular between safety experts and urban planners.

Public places can be made safer for various types of users through some of the following recommendations.

1. *Foster urban safety through inclusive policies and practices* by: (a) prioritizing the voices of the most marginalized to articulate their own needs; (b) building their own capacities to create safe and secure places, both independently and through collective action; and (c) placing these at the core of a roadmap towards fostering urban safety for all. This also involves supporting community champions, local thought leaders and social workers to continue to innovate local solutions to prevent and reduce crime and fear in public places.
2. *Use innovative measures to accurately understand people's vulnerabilities to crime and fear*. Field test methodologies that provide a workable set of principles to guide efforts to understand the vulnerabilities to crime and fear at street, neighborhood and city levels and how these vary by gender, age and identity.
3. *Prioritize safety for all, not securitizing, public places*. A strong and articulate stand against militaristic and hard targeted responses to urban crime and violence, which have limited success and often create long-term instability, is required. Policies and programs that are more likely to be successful in the long-run promote a sense of shared ownership over public places. Increasing the visibility, validity and voice of, for example, street traders, to inform legal, design and planning frameworks to co-produce safe and secure places in the city can revitalize neighborhoods "lost" to crime and fear. It is essential to think "inclusive" when it comes to public places. Public places should be envisioned, designed and built considering the everyday lives, needs and desires of users, children, young people and their families.

23.4 Conclusions

In summary, cities can address crime and fear in public places as issues of good urban governance with citizens as the key agents of change. Successful experiences that have reduced urban crime and fear have been shown to improve governance and at the same time benefit greatly from the improved framework for interaction among urban development actors. Participatory governance through urban planning and management approaches towards sustainable urban development are critical to addressing crime and fear in public spaces and are basic to

the strategy for reducing urban insecurities. It is essential to keep in mind that safety is a human right—to feel free from risk and fear of danger is crucial for all people and a prerequisite for modern society. Safety guarantees, in a sustainable city, every person has the right to a place to live free of danger and free of fear. Safety also promotes and encourages mobility, which is fundamental to an individual's quality of life. Indeed, successful, thriving and prosperous communities are characterized by spaces that are safe and attractive—"livable" places of which local people are proud and to which they feel a sense of belonging and ownership.

If a city is to be called sustainable, "all" places may not be planned for everyone, but everyone should have a place in it. Not in a segregated city, but in an environment where safety is a guaranteed human right.

References

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