

# ICEBERG OR OIL SLICK? THE HISTORY OF CPTED AS INNOVATION

## INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I read a piece called “Balancing Deeper and Wider” (Herr 1992). It is an article about innovation and the ways that innovations originate, develop, and then spread. Its author, Toby Herr, says that innovators tend to think about the transfer of their ideas in two basic ways.

One type of innovator insists on “going deep.” The deep innovator recognizes intricacies in the innovation that others may not, something akin to an iceberg. Herr says:

*Deepness at its core is using an experimental approach to develop, test, and refine ideas; to know what is working and retain it and to know what is failing to work and discard it; and, in general, to keep asking, "How can I do it better and better?" (Herr, 1992:29).*

The problem with “going deep” is the innovator spends so much time trying to perfect things that the idea never spreads, and only the original location accrues any benefit from its development.

By comparison, wideness resembles an oil slick. Its most important aspect is export, and the innovator only feels successful if the idea spreads like wildfire. “Going wide” means you don’t have to consider the details and local dynamics of the original project or program. Problem is, the innovation is more likely to fail over the long-term.

Finding the appropriate blend of wideness and deepness is the trick. Should an innovation spread to as many locations as possible, or should one community’s ideas serve as a seed that another place can nurture and grow into something all its own?

In the United States the transfer process becomes complicated by the fact that many funding opportunities and policy priorities are established by the federal government, while the greatest potential for innovation and change resides at the local level, in communities and neighborhoods, with those who know how things *really* work, and who will put the innovation into operation.<sup>1</sup>

What I would like to do today is to think about the history of CPTED using Herr’s deeper vs. wider construct. The question then becomes, *has CPTED been the iceberg or the oil slick?*

## THE EARLY YEARS: CHICAGO, JANE, JEFF AND OSCAR<sup>2</sup>

We begin with the work of the Chicago School of Sociology, which established a working foundation for our more recent applications of CPTED. Why begin here? Because Park and Burgess were trying to “go deep,” creating an empirical framework for studying and thinking about neighborhoods. (The title of Chapter VIII in the book *The City*, published by the

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<sup>1</sup> I note here the shift from the “War on Drugs” to “Community Policing” to “Homeland Security,” each with its own set of program priorities, funding sources, and award criteria at the federal level, while quality of life and the day-to-day experiences of many citizens relative to crime and fear have not changed.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Paul and Pat Brantingham for their paper, *The Theory of CPTED*, presented at the American Society of Criminology Conference, Baltimore, November 1996, from which I have borrowed heavily.

University of Chicago Press in 1925 is, *Can Neighborhood Work Have a Scientific Basis?*). Park says his work was borne out of a need for conceptual and theoretical clarification:

*I did not see how we could have anything like scientific research unless we had a system of classification and a frame of reference into which we could sort out and describe in general terms the things we were attempting to investigate. . . .*

Coser, Lewis A., *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*  
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 357

I'm not sure that Park would necessarily consider himself innovative, but I think his point here about being systematic and understanding exactly what we want to explore, is a critical one. Park and Burgess put the first tools in the CPTED toolbox. Through their work we began to ask questions, like:

What do we mean when we call something a “neighborhood”?  
How do we define it (its size, its center, its shape)?  
What forces and processes are at work in this neighborhood?  
How do we study those forces/processes and what measures do we use?  
What can one neighborhood tell us about all neighborhoods?

Jane Jacobs was neither empirical nor theoretical; rather, she was an astute observer of her own environment. Jacobs was reacting to the insensitive destruction of urban renewal in the United States, something she described as a dedication to the “doctrine of salvation by bricks.” She reviled against planners who insisted that new and nice and uniform development was better than an old, crazy, mixed-up, and possibly deteriorated but still lively, functioning community.

Most CPTED practitioners believe they know *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, but I think maybe we are only invested in some of the slogans that emerged from her thinking. Kenneth Kolson describes her this way:

*Jacobs was something of an **enfant terrible** who enjoyed expressing perfectly reasonable propositions in terms that were slightly outrageous, with the predictable result that her arguments, while memorable, could easily be caricatured: crowds are good, zoning is bad, parks are dangerous, children should play in the street.*

Kenneth Kolson, *Big Plans: The Allure and Folly of Urban Design*  
Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 2

In other words, Jacobs didn't know exactly *why* things worked, she just knew they did. Jacobs thus created a huge oil slick that sent folks a-slippin' and a-slidin', trying to figure out just exactly how to apply her words of wisdom. A couple of these folks worked really hard to get a grip on things, and set the stage for our CPTED work today.

The first of these is Jeff. The rest of you probably know him (if you do) as Dr. Clarence Ray – or C. Ray Jeffrey, but to me, after many years in Tallahassee doing lunch, he's just Jeff. Jeff says, “Jacobs really got me to thinking” and think, think, think he did. Jeff was dismayed by the revolving door of the criminal justice system, one that assumed a few days or months or years

behind bars would somehow change the way an offender behaved once he was thrown back into the same environment where he'd lived and worked and played and committed crimes before.

So in 1971 Jeff proposed a new approach to crime control, one focused on prevention, one that would consider the full array of physical, legal, economic and social characteristics of an offender's environment. He called this *crime prevention through environmental design*. Some people thought this was really innovative; a lot of them thought Jeff was a complete idiot for challenging the status quo. The biggest problem was that Jeff's theories required us to go deep, and there was no easy or efficient way to test his ideas to see if he was actually correct in his thinking.

Around that same time, Oscar Newman produced his book on *Defensible Space* (subtitled *Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*). As this title suggests, Newman focused on the architectural aspects of the environment and the ways that design contributes to, or detracts from, opportunities for offending. Newman was primarily concerned with creating an environment that would be "uncomfortable" for offenders. He was very good at promoting and testing his own ideas – and they were easy ideas to understand and implement: harden the target, improve surveillance, redefine space to create territorial signals, improve the general character of the community and remove the stigma of public housing – and you will prevent crime.

#### RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION AND INNOVATION TRANSFER

One deep, one wide.

Jeff's hypotheses required greater examination and elaboration, and he inspired a generation of researchers who dedicated themselves to better understanding the relationship between the environment and opportunities for crime. Newman's ideas instead set in motion a flurry of activity, funded by the U.S. government, demonstrating the ways that the design of the physical environment could prevent crime.

At least that's the way we see it now. But at the time, the lines between these two innovators blurred, primarily because some of Jeff's former students, familiar with his book on crime prevention through environmental design, decided that CPTED should be the focus of their work.<sup>3</sup>

*The Westinghouse team "rejected using the defensible space concept since they considered it too narrow to encompass the varying environments that were to be evaluated . . . Instead, they chose Jeffery's (sic) CPTED formulation since it treats 'both the proper design and the effective use of the environment' and it 'involves an integration of strategies selected from existing and new physical and urban design<sup>4</sup>, community organization and citizen (social) management, and law enforcement prevention concepts.'"* . . .

NILECJ, in Schneider and Kitchen, *Planning for Crime Prevention*

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<sup>3</sup> Rumor has it the Westinghouse team intended to use defensible space strategies, but was prevented in that work because Newman had retained rights to the term "defensible space" and would not provide permission.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that, concurrent with the Westinghouse demonstrations, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Justice also funded an examination of urban design and crime prevention, completed by Richard Gardiner.

The Westinghouse group tested CPTED in a residential neighborhood, in a commercial/mixed use area, and in schools. They attempted to go deep, by studying and surveying and analyzing each of these locations, by testing a variety of CPTED strategies and worrying about their impact on crime. But the ultimate goal of the federal funding (and therefore of the Westinghouse work) was to help CPTED to go wide, to spread like wildfire and take hold in communities across the country. Doing that required that the researchers create a simple language and approach readily accessible to a broad array of practitioners.

So, regardless of the depth of understanding in their tests, what they revealed, and what we remember, are the three basic CPTED concept: access control, natural surveillance, and territorial reinforcement. And those basic concepts aren't really so different from defensible space after all. You'll also note that, although the NILECJ report identifies "community organization and citizen (social) management" as critical elements of CPTED, these are virtually absent from the basic concepts, probably because the physical environment is much easier to manipulate and to understand than is the social environment. Schneider and Kitchen offer this evaluation of the early demonstration work:

*In the end, "neither defensible space nor CPTED lived up to their advance billing . . . given the rudimentary state of knowledge about the extraordinarily complex nature of human-environment interactions and a corresponding lack of sophistication in the evaluative research instruments of the day." (p. 133)*

In other words, going deep really wasn't possible because we didn't know how to go deep. We needed to wait for all that research that Jeff had inspired to provide us better analysis, better information, and better tools for understanding how to prevent crime.

#### CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS: MAINTAINING A BALANCE

Since I have neither the time nor the inclination to continue to dwell on individual developments in the field, I would like to make some broad observations about the evolution of CPTED in the years since Jeff, Newman and the Westinghouse demonstrations. These are my own, very American, views on the state-of-the-art, and I welcome any arguments to the contrary.

My first observation is that we've spent a great deal of time trying to go wide. Going wide wasn't really such a bad idea, since we already had some evidence that CPTED could work, and we were getting more and more evidence from the research on how that needed to happen. In our guts we just *knew* CPTED was the right thing to do.

The problem is, we've had 30-some odd years of "wide" and in many ways, CPTED is still in its infancy. Somehow we haven't managed to use the available research to any great advantage, and many CPTED practitioners still only know the terms "access control, natural surveillance, and territorial reinforcement." They don't understand how, or don't have the (administrative, financial, or political) capacity or the tools, to go deep.

In the end, I worry that the oil slick may, literally and figuratively, slip CPTED out from under us. Without evidence for what we want to do, without evaluation methodologies in place to show what is or is not working and where, without community involvement in and support for our

work, we will never see CPTED employed as widely as we would like. And that's the great conundrum: we need to go deep in order to expand CPTED's adoption.

My second observation is that, when communities have resolved to go deep, we have either ignored the value of this work, or blindly adopted it as a way to solve our own problems. Many of us in the States were inspired by Sarasota's CPTED ordinance, the product of years of collaborative work and neighborhood analysis on the part of a citywide administrative task force. Did we really want to know how those folks in Sarasota came to the conclusion that an ordinance was necessary? Did we understand the intricate workings of the planning process, the task force, the individuals involved in creating and enforcing the regulations? No. We just wanted a copy of the ordinance so we could use it ourselves.

One of my personal frustrations – and one I believe I share with Wendy Sarkissian and Greg Saville, among others – is that the community is frequently left out of the CPTED equation. Historically, studies of territoriality have shown CPTED has virtually no impact on community social organization or social control. Well, this is probably because CPTED was done *to* the community rather than *with* them, and didn't consider community demographics, local culture or other important characteristics. We need to pay close attention to the work that some of our ICA members are doing with aboriginal and indigenous populations – people like Macarena Rau, and Tinnus Kruger, and Wendy Sarkissian, and Ray Van Dusen -- because they can teach us lessons and bring us advice we can use in our work with communities.

I might also, selfishly, mention here that I have dedicated significant time in recent years to improving the citizen involvement process, providing for the framing of issues, the deliberation of choices and the development of strategies that are community-based and locally relevant. Without this, I believe what we are doing is merely “security” and not really “CPTED.”

Which leads me to my third observation. In the past several years I have noted a real penchant for, almost an addiction to, technologies like CCTV among ICA members. Now, I understand the need for target hardening and the various advantages that CCTV can bring, but I fear we are increasingly using these types of strategies as a one-size-fits-all approach to crime prevention. Use them too widely, and we potentially ignore or eliminate other opportunities available to us. To some extent, lighting – possibly due to its relationship to CCTV – is in a similar situation. The literature on the efficacy of lighting in the United States is nearly 20 years old now. Time for us to go deep!

I would like to comment on the need for additional evaluation research on CPTED. Several years ago I heard a keynote address delivered by Frank Zimring. Though he was speaking about the federal government's choices regarding the war on drugs, a single sentence in his speech resonated for me: *"What we choose to measure says as much about what we think is important as it does about how well we're doing."*

And so I ask: What is important to us as CPTED practitioners? Is it all about crime? fear? victimization? Or are we really worried about community organization and social control? Is CPTED a crime prevention strategy? or an economic development tool? Have we achieved our goal if everyone is doing CPTED, even if no one knows if we're successful? Each of these questions suggests different types of measures and different evaluation needs.

And finally, I would like to speak to those of you who are engaged in the design professions, because your work in CPTED is very important – and very different. It's one thing to understand CPTED and to think about access control and natural surveillance and territorial reinforcement in an existing environment with known crime problems or other issues. It's a completely different world for those who are planning and designing for new developments in new places, and with no history of problems.

*. . . . the designer's moves tend, happily or unhappily, to produce consequences other than those intended. . . . The web of moves has many branchings, which complicates the problem of discovering and honoring implications. . . . the designer must consider not only the present choice but the tree of further choices to which it leads, each of which has different meanings in relation to the systems of implications set up by earlier moves. . . . Thus there is a continually evolving system of implications within which the designer reflects-in-action.*

Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*  
Basic Books, 1983, p. 100

Schön thus suggests that the work of the designer is inherently deep, assuming the designer reflects on his or her own work and its long-term implications. But I don't think his statement is limited to designers. Instead, I believe his words should speak to all of us as CPTED practitioners.

And so I ask that you take up this challenge: write the next chapter in CPTED's history, and make it a chapter full of creativity, innovation, reflection, evaluation, and an appropriate balance of deep and wide.