Cutting Crime Impact (CCI)

CCI is an EU-funded project that enables law enforcement agencies (LEAs) and relevant local and national authorities (i.e. security policymakers) to reduce the impact of crime and, where possible, prevent crime from occurring in the first place. The CCI project will enable a preventative, evidence-based and sustainable approach to tackling high-impact petty crime.

What is Crime Prevention through Urban Design and Planning (CP-UDP)?

CP-UDP prevents crime and feelings of insecurity through the application of evidence-based design and planning strategies within proposals for new buildings and environments. CP-UDP is delivered by urban planners, architects, designers, and urban managers who may be advised by crime prevention specialists working for LEAs or local authorities. By carefully considering how a location might be used and experienced — both legitimately and illegitimately — CP-UDP seeks to positively impact the behaviour of human users, including potential offenders and victims. CP-UDP strategies embed protective physical features within attractive design outcomes and encourage prosocial behaviour through good design and place management. CP-UDP draws on principles established in the fields of ‘Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design’ (CPTED) and environmental psychology.

Recent developments impacting CP-UDP

CP-UDP is impacted by a number of developments that have taken place in recent years, including the privatisation of public space; increased use of surveillance technologies in urban contexts; the popularity of smartphones and use of associated location tracking technologies; and the collection and use of personal data for targeted service delivery.

In the prevention of crime, two approaches relevant to the delivery of CP-UDP have emerged:

- The increased focus by national / local government and the police on taking proactive measures to prevent future crime problems.
- The increased use of partnerships and networks in decision-making around urban security (e.g. community safety partnerships; Sicherheitspartnerschaft; etc.).
Why do ethics and human rights matter for CP-UDP?

Adopted in 1950, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) enshrines the right to: respect for private and family life; freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; as well as the freedom of assembly and association. These are non-absolute human rights that may only be limited by states or their institutions under certain circumstances: (i) on the basis of a specific law; (ii) in pursuit of a goal that is necessary in a democratic society; and (3) in the selection and application of proportionate measures. CP-UDP has a role in the design of environments in which such limitations might reasonably take place, but it also has the mission of preventing such limitations becoming necessary through good design.

In defining our urban environments, CP-UDP can significantly affect the conditions under which these human rights may be enjoyed. While CP-UDP is necessarily engaged in the early stage of building development projects, it is important that these end conditions — and their impact — are kept in mind. CP-UDP is a practical, predominantly process-driven, professional discipline. There is a risk that pragmatic considerations may outweigh the consideration of human rights priorities. This may hamper the protection, respect and promotion of human rights through public-funded design interventions — even where their focus is to support security and reduce crime.

Ethical, legal and social concerns

Ethical concerns

There are two main ethical concerns that should be taken into account by those undertaking CP-UDP

- Surveillance society — Increased surveillance reduces privacy, autonomy and individual agency. It is possible that the sense of a place being ‘public’ is undermined by surveillance, which may negatively impact its use by citizens for legitimate purposes. Driving out users is not the ideal solution to public space issues.

- Stigmatisation of areas — Insensitive / over-use of ‘hard’ security measures in CP-UDP can impact citizens’ perceptions of the location, and their likelihood to feel positively towards it. This can lead to the stigmatisation of an area / neighbourhood, as well as the communities that live there.

Legal Concerns

It is important that, where administrative laws require CP-UDP advice to inform applications for building permits, that the embodiment of this advice within the building design is open to public challenge in the same way that designs uninformed by CP-UDP might be. This should normally take place through a public planning process.

Social Concerns

CP-UDP reduces opportunities for criminality while empowering citizens to use their built environment. CP-UDP is not only concerned with preventing crime, but with reducing feelings of insecurity and thereby improving the quality of life of citizens. CP-UDP measures may help highlight illegitimate behaviour and support citizens to become ‘capable guardians’ (so called ‘eyes on the street’) so that, where they feel comfortable, they may challenge illegitimate behaviour. However, there will be situations when such ‘capable guardianship’ may put citizens at unacceptable risk.

CP-UDP is never a replacement for effective policing.

Ethical, legal and social issues relating to CP-UDP touch upon debates concerning the root causes of criminality and the ‘nudging’ of citizen behaviour by the state. This is particularly problematic when involving the use of electronic surveillance and technologies related to the so-called ‘smart city’, which is closely linked to the digitalisation of societal life in general. In this regard, CP-UDP strategies may need to include consideration of issues such as network security, information security and data protection. One can perhaps foresee a time when a citizen may be ‘virtually mugged’ when walking home, or have their identity stolen by a hacked ‘smart bus stop’.

Conclusion and recommendations

Distinct approaches to policing, urban planning and crime prevention across Europe make the standardisation of CP-UDP practice in detail problematic. However, there are common principles — notably regarding the importance of: a process approach, a common language between disciplines, and effective multi-agency cooperation.

CP-UDP ethical issues mainly relate to the danger of driving the creation of a ‘surveillance society’, and the potential stigmatisation of environments and communities through poor design decisions — such as overly harsh security measures.

LEAs and others delivering CP-UDP need to recognise the importance of these principles and develop policies and procedures for connecting with stakeholders — especially architects and urban planners — early in the design process (ideally at the concept design stage).

Our increasingly digitised urban spaces require additional solutions to those used for the traditional cities in which CP-UDP developed over the past decade. The ‘Smart technologies’ increasingly present in our public spaces, our streets and in our homes require new ‘smart’ CP-UDP solutions that transcend both the physical and digital environment.