

# Compare and contrast situational crime prevention



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A democratic society is one in which all supreme powers lie with the people of that community. It requires individuals to answer for his or her actions and requires people to know what they can and can not do. It is a system that promotes individual accountability and responsibility with an oversight to judge one's actions. Democracy promotes rights and freedoms and guarantees society criminal punishment when these rights and freedoms have been infringed upon. This means that in order to live in a democratic society, individuals must value and respect others around them, follow the norms and standards of society, and understand that sanctions apply if they infringe upon another's standard of life.

Crimes are simply the acts or omissions that violate what is acceptable in society. Crime theory underlines why certain actions are unacceptable and improper; it illustrates reasons why people commit crime and demonstrates why there must be consequences in order to deter others. In most western societies there are codes of conduct or laws that regulate how society is to function and how individuals are to behave. However, no matter how many rules, there remain individuals insistent on partaking in crime and unacceptable behaviour. Born is crime prevention, one approach to dealing with crime.

Crime prevention is an “ attempt to reduce victimization and to deter crime and criminals. It is applied specifically to efforts made by governments to reduce crime, enforce the law, and maintain criminal justice.[1]It can be divided into “ people, place and situation”.[2]The approach that focuses on people is generally known as ‘ crime prevention through social development’, where as the approach that focuses on place is generally

known as 'crime prevention through environmental design'. When these two approaches are combined with 'situational crime prevention' it has been found that there can be serious reductions in actual crime and delinquency. For the purpose of this essay we are concerned with situational crime prevention and defensible space, a form of crime prevention through environmental design.

## **Situational Crime Prevention**

Situational crime prevention (SCP) is a strategy which tries to reduce the opportunity for crime by increasing the risks and decreasing the rewards of committing crime.[3] SCP focuses on preventing the opportunity for crime to occur by addressing factors within a given location that create a crime 'hotspot'. This also includes diminishing characteristics that may make some people more vulnerable to victimisation because of certain situations.

[4] Increasing the risks of detection, reducing the rewards for offending and increasing the difficulty of offending are all ways to prevent situational crimes. Preventative measures can include installing locks and alarms, increasing surveillance through lighting and making buildings harder to enter. SCP is based on the theory that most crimes committed are contextual and opportunistic. Therefore, an individual about to commit a crime is simply responding to the situation around them. SCP examines the circumstances and environment in which individuals may commit crimes, it then identifies possible risks or future crimes, and then searches for solutions specific to those situations.

SCP solutions could include:

Increasing the effort required to commit a crime, making it less attractive

Increasing the risk of being caught

Reducing the potential rewards of crime

Reducing provocations and temptations

Removing excuses for committing crime

SCP consists of three sub theories:

Routine Activity Theory – Every crime involves three elements: an offender, a target, and an insufficiently guarded environment (thus, must address one or all three).

Rational Choice Theory – Criminals make rational choices (and not randomly) and thus can be deterred from crime.

Offender Search Theory – Crime is very opportunistic; offenders respond to cues given out by the environment (thus, must focus on reducing opportunities).

Basically, situational crimes occur because of the situation and environment that an individual is in. Therefore to prevent crime, the theory illustrates that we must change the environment and setting of not only criminal hotspots, but also all area's where possible crimes may take place. An example of an effective SCP campaign is that of the Victorian Governments new measures on street crime. There have been a growing number of intoxicated individuals in the CBD of Melbourne and some individuals and groups have

been involved in fights and drunken and disorderly behavior. Situational solutions included education of bar staff and patrons about responsible drinking; regulations addressing the number, size and location of bars and their closing times; police presence at closing times; and availability of public transport. This one form of SCP has worked in that assaults in the CBD of Melbourne have decreased on average 5.6% since 2008-2009 to 2009-2010. [5]

This leads us in to the term defensible space.

## **Defensible Space**

Defensible Space (DS) is the idea that crime and delinquency can be controlled and mitigated through community and environmental design. The idea is important because it associates an individual's environment to his or her expectation of crime in the community or society to which they belong. [6]The difference between DS and SCP is that DS is concerned with the residential environment whose physical characteristics (building layout and site plan) function to allow residents themselves to become the key agents in ensuring their own security[7], SCP on the other hand relies on governments or authorities assessing the situation and environment of a crime, and then provide sustainable measures in dealing with the setting so as to provide a crime free zone.

DS argues that a community is safer when the people feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their piece of society. It asserts that “ the criminal is isolated” and cut off “ because his turf is removed”[8]when all land and property is owned and cared for individuals or members of the

community. " If an intruder can sense a watchful community, he feels less secure committing his crime"[9]. The idea is that crime and delinquency can be controlled and mitigated through environmental designs.

There are four factors that make a defensible space:[10]

Territoriality - the idea that one's home is sacred

Natural surveillance - the link between an area's physical characteristics and the residents' ability to see what is happening

Image - the capacity of the physical design to impart a sense of security

Milieu - other features that may affect security, such as proximity to a police substation or busy commercial area

These factors that make a defensible space are crucial to effectively prevent crimes. DS goes further than SCP because it does not rely on crimes to take place, then be analyzed by a third party, and then enacted upon by future deterrent by lack of opportunity. DS can simply prevent crimes because individuals are not likely to offend when they know that there is a member of the community watching them.

## **SCP Strengths**

SCP prevents the opportunity for future crimes to exist by addressing the environment and setting to which past crimes have occurred. With the opportunity gone, the theory states that there can be no crime.

SCP makes use of mechanical and organizational measures such as CCTV camera's and security guards. This is an effective way to observe crime and

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keep the public out of harms way in that individuals do not need to confront offenders. This is in the public's best interest in that it is harm minimization for all members of society.

## **DS Strengths**

DS is inexpensive on the public purse in that it is the people that are policing society. Governments don't need to spend endless amounts of money into new crime prevention techniques and gadgets.

DS promotes public awareness and natural surveillance to crime; with the public all looking for crime then individuals have little chance of getting away with crime. This fact deters individuals from offending in that the risk of getting caught greatly out-weighs that of not. It also promotes public unity, in that the people of society can unite as one against the face of crime and report everything they see.

## **Contrast and Critique**

In analysing DS we can establish the notion that it attempts to be the only preventative measure against crime. DS is individualistic and private, and SCP is collective and public. However, the theory of DS does embark on the opportunity to make SCP and other crime prevention theories obsolete. DS is about changing the environment so as to deter individuals from crime. So therefore, we could engender the concept that if all environments were changed to a private setting, and all individuals take on all four characteristics illustrated in DS, then there is no opportunity in theory for crime to be committed. If natural surveillance increases the threat of being caught by taking steps to increase the perception that people can be seen,

then that should be enough to deter possible offenders. Natural surveillance through environmental design should, if effectively rolled out, be enough to take opportunity away from possible situations, and thus make SCP invalid in that DS has managed to do what SCP aimed at doing.

We can see that whilst in theory DS can effectively deal with preventing crime in the public and private arena, it is wholly unrealistic to suggest that DS, based on environmental design is ever going to be put into one hundred percent practice. Like most theories and ideologies, we can only implement parts and elements of the theory. It is unrealistic to suggest that in Australian society, let alone the world, DS can be permitted and effectively rolled out. There is simply not enough money to pay for the infrastructure needed to create such an ideology present, and that is assuming that it would be a joint venture between both public and private financing. Not everyone can afford to upgrade their house so as to convene the philosophies of DS.

It is obvious that both DS and SCP need to work together to create sustainable and effective crime prevention. Both share common ground in that both rely on some form of surveillance to effectively deny an opportunity to prevent crime occurring. Natural surveillance measures can be complemented by mechanical and organizational measures. For example, CCTV cameras can be added in areas where window surveillance is unavailable. This combines the strengths of both SCP and DS in that CCTV prevents the opportunity for crime because offenders can be identified. This



is one example of how SCP and DS can both work together to achieve crime prevention.

More security guards in shopping centers is both a SCP and DS preventative measure in that the individuals are less likely to offend with a security guard is about, the visible presence is an SCP tactic. If there is crime, the people in the shopping centre can notify the security guards, who as an authority, can act accordingly, this is a DS tactic.

## **Conclusion**

I started off this essay by talking about two things, democracy and its relationship with crime. DS and SCP as ideologies and theories, to an extent, whilst protecting some of our rights, actually take away what we most prize; our fundamental rights to freedom and privacy. These essential rights and freedoms are inhibited upon through the enactment of DS and SCP; it brings us to the question therefore at what price must we pay to feel safe and secure, to be a crime free society? This question is beyond me because I have mixed views, I like the notions behind DS and SCP and agree more so with philosophies behind DS, however, I also understand that to protect rights we infringe on others.