Towards an Interface Index

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Abstract

Current crime prevention theories identify the interaction of three entities - target, offender, and the mediating environment - as the analytical focus from which solutions for reducing certain crimes types can be derived. The understanding of how environmental features act as intervening factors between offender and target is conceptualised through a rational choice theory of offenders that underpins most studies. Rational choice theory focuses on the immediate decision making process of potential offenders, while situational crime prevention analyzes actions with the aim to reduce opportunities by “designing out crime” through measures that will increase risk and effort, and decrease rewards. Tactics involve different scales of environmental and spatial design or redesign, often referred to as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). Previous space syntax research, acknowledged in a guide published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Home Office, contribute to the CPTED debate by showing important correlations between level of relative spatial accessibility, spatial morphologies and specific crime patterns.

The paper presents a morphological study of housing estates in Stockwell, South London, in the perspective of CPTED. The study hypothesis is anchored on findings from previous configurational spatial analysis (Hillier 2002, Shu & Hillier, 2000). However, for statutory reasons, the quality of the crime records disclosed by the police make it impossible to develop a precise spatial analysis similar to Shu et al. This led to formulation of the current model for assessing environmental potential for crime, or a interface index, which is to be rooted on a robust ensemble of evidence-based research. In project design scenario evaluation, the inherent absence of records, ranked potential interface index maps provide a structured framework in decision making processes as well as architectural and urban design training. In research situations of existing design, such an index is thought to be useful when precise data are not available due to the Data Protection Act or other restriction. This conjectural approach could posteriorly be tested against precise crime record data by those with access.

Preliminary results revealed morphological changes analogous to those identified in Summers Town, North London, by Hanson (2000), who characterised them as a change “from streets which seem rather similar to one another to housing estates which seem very different from one another.” They also show that the metric analysis of “constitutedness”, detailed land uses, and density provides a vivid picture of changes in the street level interface map. Finally, it is conjectured that the most difficult part of creating a interface index will be to establish the interaction and weighting of the factors outlined above.
Literature


