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Crime Prevention through Housing Design

Policy and Practice

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Series Editor's Preface

To many independent observers it would seem a statement of the obvious that the design of the environment has an impact on crime. If you create lots of opportunities in terms of good places to hide and keep watch on potential targets, provide easy getaway routes (on foot or by vehicle), make covert entry and exit to estates and buildings possible, in short if you make it easy for offenders, then it seems obvious that it would be more risky to live and work at such locales. To put it a different way, Rachel Armitage summarises thus: 'When people feel safe in an area, they are less likely to choose to move out, more likely to use public transport, more likely to make use of public facilities and less likely to require the intervention of health professionals for issues such as stress and anxiety.' And, as she discusses, a sequence of studies that have examined the Secured by Design (SBD) schemes – by different authors in different places, including Rachel – have consistently found them to be successful in reducing crime and, for the most part, cost-effective too. Yet the value of designing out crime remains contested territory.

This book, however, is about more than just defending the theories and practices of designing out crime. Rachel engages with a range of critiques of the designing out crime approach generally and the SBD scheme specifically, and in so doing draws parallels with many of the problems encountered in making crime prevention and security measures work. For example, she explores some of the synergies and tensions between security and surveillance and security and sustainability; the concept of risk and how it underpins approaches (or should do); the history, politics (national and local), economics and environmental issues that have impacted on the acceptance and adoption of different strategies; and the importance and potential of localism. Via comparisons with Australia and the Netherlands she highlights some advantages and drawbacks of bedding this type of crime prevention in the legal process; and, by reference to practices in the UAE, she shows how culture and traditional attitudes can undermine commitment to an effective designing out crime approach. She discusses the crucial role played by the police, and how a business

model approach to SBD in one force offers potential for sustaining commitment while the marginalisation of the police in favour of private consultants raises questions of 'neutrality and quality' that have the potential to undermine its credibility.

Rachel has devoted her professional life to the subject of crime prevention through environmental design and this book is the culmination of that interest, which is reflected in the extensive review of a wide range of literature including different theories and practices. She sees the faults in designing out crime and SBD, including the alleged inflexibility, inconsistent delivery, confusion of principles and lack of scope, to name but a few. But on finding the evidence overwhelming she puts the case and in so doing expresses surprise that others are less convinced. It might be that the security and crime prevention worlds are just not used to success stories and a book that articulates one becomes an important contribution to the debate.

Martin Gill

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