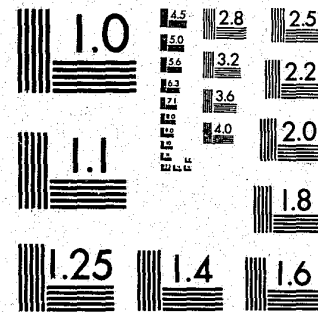


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THE SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION
FOR THE STUDY OF DELINQUENCY

PLANNING FOR DELINQUENCY?
WHO PREVENTS CRIME?

A REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE ANNUAL CONFERENCES OF 1977 AND 1978

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION By Sheriff Iain Macphail, Chairman, S.A.S.D.	1 - 4
<u>ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1977: PLANNING FOR DELINQUENCY?</u>	5
X "DEFENSIBLE SPACE": A VIEW FROM THE STANDPOINT OF AN ARCHITECT AND PLANNER by Mrs. Kirsteen Holmes, D.A., R.I.B.A., A.R.I.A.S., S.P. Dip., F.R.T.P.I.	6 - 13 64223
X "DEFENSIBLE SPACE": A POLICE OFFICER'S VIEW by Superintendent Archibald MacKenzie, Strathclyde Police.	14 - 20 64224
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND DELINQUENCY Summary of a paper by Professor Terence Lee, Department of Psychology, University of Surrey.	21
GROUP DISCUSSIONS	22 - 24
<u>ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1978: WHO PREVENTS CRIME?</u>	25
X WHO PREVENTS CRIME? Keynote address by Dr. R.V.G. Clarke, Home Office Research Unit.	26 - 49 64225
GROUP DISCUSSIONS	50 - 60
ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY SESSION by The Hon. Lord Stewart, M.C., Conference Chairman.	61 - 64

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- 6 -

"DEFENSIBLE SPACE": A VIEW FROM THE STANDPOINT OF AN ARCHITECT AND PLANNER

BY MRS. KIRSTEEN HOLMES, D.A., R.I.B.A., A.R.I.A.S., S.P. Dip, F.R.T.P.I.

Two things have become clear from our limited researches into "defensible space". One is that there are many opinions and very few data; the other, that vandalism and damage to property is rated very high in public concern.

The recently published Consumer Supplement to the NEDO report on "Housing for All" has carried out a sample survey which rates these topics as the top of the list of priorities, and while we have not examined the components of this sample, it seems to be in line with our own limited experience. So, we have widespread concern; little well-documented material on which to base remedial efforts; and now, among many social workers, designers and managers, an eager acceptance of the causes and treatment suggested by Oscar Newman. Since these treatments are physical - alterations, demolitions, rebuilding and relandscaping - we must look carefully to see whether experience in this country confirms or contradicts Professor Newman's findings, and what action is needed here to produce improvements in our existing black spots, to avoid deterioration of other areas, and to incorporate in future design briefs for new building, instructions which might help to avoid past mistakes.

What can we learn as planners and designers in this country from the United States experience? Are there opportunities here to give a new injection of quality into trouble spots, by manipulation of the environment? Or is the most drastic step of all, demolition of the offending buildings, the only solution, as some authorities are now considering? Is there in fact good reason to believe that the post-war housing block, however much we may dislike its design, is in fact a major cause of delinquency?

First, it does appear that very many old and new housing schemes throughout the country live up to "defensible space" criteria, while there are also black spots in areas where these criteria seem to be well met and where, although expensively and carefully built and landscaped, the schemes are still in trouble. We have discussed their experience with social workers, managers and designers, as well as our friends in the Community Involvement Branch a

With the increasing need for two-apartment houses and flats for couples without children, single people and students, it is to be hoped that the spare capacity in tall blocks can be used, since half-empty blocks are very much at risk. It is perhaps easiest to recognise the warning signs of dirty corridors and stairs, graffiti and closed doors. Recognisable signs of security such as mats outside doors, plants in brackets, even sometimes bits of carpet in access corridors, and the drying area used for growing vegetables and, of course, stairs cleaned, do in fact exist all over the city, particularly in flats where tenants are selected from families without children. S.S.H.A. have experience in an area of generally high vandalism, where the high block in which couples without children are housed shows such signs of security, and here the tenants regard the curtaining of the windows of the common hall as part of the reason for their individual success - a contradiction of Oscar Newman's thesis that they should be overlooked!

People in fact exercise some selection in favour of tall blocks where they are conveniently placed for shops and transport. In spite of generally unfavourable comments in the press, these better-sited blocks are still actually in demand.

Another group which it has been suggested should not be in high flats are elderly people, either as couples or living alone. Here it seems that the ideal of taking responsibility for the old, as components of an extended family within the community, is one which we are not now ready to accept, and which in fact many old people would reject for their safety's sake. We were surprised to find that the flats selected for this group of people have survived well even in the most difficult circumstances. Take the Red Road flats as an example, where the worst blocks are not much less disastrous than those described by Newman in New York, yet those selected for older people have fared better. There is less vandalism, less intrusion by strangers and more mutual support than elsewhere.

There/.....

There are of course, old people who dislike intensely being herded together out of "the action" and can indeed be made quite ill by this kind of move. Perhaps more old people would like to be able to live in the centre of the community if they were not alarmed, indeed terrorised, by older children. Should it not be an objective of our society to give the older people the choice of living close to the family, or in the more sheltered environment of their contemporaries?

In the increasingly worrying situation which faces us in this country, what can we learn from Oscar Newman's study? As far as landscape and environmental improvements (such as his Clason Point rehabilitation scheme) are concerned, these are perfectly feasible and are indeed being carried out here at varying scales, from tenement and backcourt improvements to provision of community and recreation centres, kick-about pitches and old people's gardens, as part of the housing rehabilitation programme in Glasgow and elsewhere.

Well-designed schemes often had these features built in from the start, and it is because we recognised these as welcoming, well-identified, places that we can easily accept their success. It has been proved however that the investment of a lot of money and effort to improve an area, once it has fallen into disrepute, can be a complete waste: it will return to its former state quite quickly, unless a major effort is made to find out what people actually want and to try to get as near as possible to their needs. An attractive back-court/back-court landscape scheme may be rejected by local tenants in favour of small individual plots; the formal layout may change to a kick-about pitch; but whatever is done stands a better chance of survival if the users have an interest in it. We can say, then, that we would accept Oscar Newman's example of an environmental improvement.

Let us turn however to his main study, for which he has produced figures: the Van Dyke and Brownsville housing schemes, both at a high density of 288 ppa. Although I am convinced that the built environment can contribute very surely to comfort, security and enjoyment of family life, it does seem that the supporting material contained in Oscar Newman's book indicates much more strongly that there were material differences/.....

differences between these two groups of tenants, and that their security and behaviour in Brownsville could well be attributed more to these caused than to the physical characteristics of the two schemes. For example, those moving into Brownsville were from better-off social strata than those in Van Dyke, and Brownsville has experienced a steadier child population, a smaller total population and a consistently higher average gross income and a consistently longer period of residence by tenants than Van Dyke. Although 6,000 was given for the total population of each scheme, the figures indicate that Brownsville was consistently under that figure by about five hundred, while Van Dyke exceeded it by nearly a thousand: a difference which in turn affects the comparison of other figures. It is perfectly understandable that tenants of the Brownsville scheme, being people on the socially upward path, have all the characteristics of possessiveness, security to accost strangers and ask them their business, and of keeping an eye on their own and their neighbour's property; whereas the occupants of the Van Dyke blocks (no inspiring design to be sure) are characterised by low income, low prospects and low self-esteem (indeed those who did not have these characteristics would quickly have removed themselves). Social workers and housing managers don't have to go to the States to recognise those signs of certain trouble, possible disaster. Has Oscar Newman not selected contrasting schemes and then imposed on them theoretical reasons for their success? If so, and if social selection is the hidden winner, what have we to learn from this?

Territoriality is the basis for "defensible space". I am not qualified to discuss the anthropological validity of this theory, but the swings of the pendulum of fashion in socio-scientific theory, with their reflection in planning thinking, have to be carefully watched. Haste has been the cause of a lot of our troubles, when mistakes were made like decanting populations the size of Perth into dreary suburbs such as Drumchapel and Easterhouse. In the changed circumstances of a shrinking population today, it would surely be wise to take time to look carefully before we leap into another drastic solution. There is at present an inclination to pull down the monuments (all too visible) of previous mistakes; but people have made them into disaster areas, and we can't pull them down. Whatever we do is going to be a costly business/.....

business, and the community will have to pay dearly for its mistakes, in terms of people and wastage. In Glasgow alone there has been over £3¹/₂m of vandalism costs in council housing alone last year and to add to many other costly troubles, there is the unquantifiable damage to the next generation.

What can we do? How do we give everyone that stake in their home and neighbourhood which we all believe is needed? Changes must be made, but this time carefully, and at a manageable speed. First, perhaps, to bring the families with young children down nearer to the ground, then give the young families some of that ground for their own use. Don't put all the large families, or all the one-parent families, or all the difficult families together; and on the other hand don't put the most difficult families in the middle of a refined, settled, houseproud group, or they will be sure to put in for a transfer! There are other considerations in providing a way of life besides keeping the vandals out, and we may be reluctant to discard the housing layout that sites the houses to look away from the road and on to gardens or a common, in favour of one where everyone faces on to a traffic route (as advocated by Newman). Not only is there a conflict with safety from traffic (and remember, for all our distress about vandalism, the motor vehicle is by far our worst killer here), but, most importantly, we must build to conform with fire safety regulations. Enclosed staircases with self-closing doors are the rule, and the "clustering of apartment entries around open stairwells", which Newman illustrates, would be unthinkable here. Such a plan, with the stairs and lift on one landing, which was satisfactory from Newman's point of view, led to a most terrible fire disaster in Sao Paolo when the upper floors were cut off with no means of escape.

The conflict existing between the demands of fire safety regulations, which require doors to be left unlocked and escape stairs to be effectively cut off in a separate compartment and the desire for security presents a serious problem which the "defensible space" theory seems to exacerbate. "The higher the building the more potentially dangerous it is", is a point that has been brought home to us only too clearly this week.

We/.....

We should also be cautious about the need for the degree of self-conscious supervision and the acceptance of policing which Oscar Newman advocates. We wish to make relaxation possible in the city (as it is in village life); but while trying to improve security for family life and the whole community, we must not tie people up in a welfare net which would be frustrating for the young and adventurous, and could actually increase the indefensible insecurity which some of our people experience now. Cities are for social living, but they are also the refuge for those who seek privacy, who wish to be a little odd: not every eccentric character is a criminal, and we must be careful that we do not plan for supervision to the point where we force people into a rigid and unhappy conformity.

Tenement living has been in the Scottish Tradition since Edinburgh's Royal Mile was built. Ten and twelve-storey buildings housing all sorts and conditions of people were built in the eighteenth century, and Glasgow's surge of tenement building followed in this tradition. The extended family, with Grannie in the "single end", was not uncommon, and there were plenty of eyes on the children playing on the back court. It is this companionship that is missing from our new schemes, and the fear of reprisals for action against vandalism has replaced neighbourly interest.

There has, however, been a change of heart in the last few years, and where older houses can be saved they are no longer being swept away. People are being given the choice of returning to their home or moving to another, and brave efforts are being made throughout Scotland to give people something nearer to what they want and need. In the past, architects and planners have had to wait until after their buildings were in use to hear from social scientists what mistakes they had made (by then they knew themselves)! Now our social scientist colleagues are helping to assess the design brief, and while this will not produce delightful buildings unless there is a good designer at work, it should produce a better response to people's needs.

New/.....

New buildings will not mend broken families, and if remedial work, in families housed in whatever accommodation, is to succeed, surely it should be undertaken quietly, without publicity? Support and teaching for families, somewhere for children to expend their surplus energy outside the home, but within reach; community buildings and services near at hand, will cost a lot of money and effort.

In examining our priorities we have to compare the cost to the community of this help and improvement against the losses due to vandalism, careless and wilful damage, and, more important than these, the unquantifiable change from lethargy and despair to hopefulness. It will take all the combined skills of social and physical planners and designers to help bring this change about. There are plenty of clever people about. Now it is time to be wise! Like W.H. Auden we must petition for "New styles of architecture, a change of Heart".

END