



The Common Thread of Spatial Influence

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Spatial influence serves as the measurable link between features of a landscape and their impacts on people and the ways they use space. Spatial vulnerability to crime will not change unless one or more factors that comprise the risk terrain are mitigated. The secret, then, is that spatial vulnerabilities are mitigated by focusing efforts on reducing or eliminating spatial influences, and not necessarily just the risky features themselves.

The effect of spatial influence is not a constant but one that can be altered to reduce risk. So, it is sensible to consider a risk reduction strategy that focuses on mitigating spatial influences. If the spatial influences of risky features increase the chance of crime and its patterns over time, then it should be equally the case that reducing these spatial influences would reduce the incidence of crime. Risk reduction strategies directed at spatial influence can involve a number of approaches that should be tailored to the specific study setting and informed by an Intervention Planning Intel Report (IPIR) and risk narrative.

One viewpoint is to consider how to reduce the negative spatial effects by dealing with their consequences, what we refer to as behavior settings that are problematic and conducive to crime. The treatment of these locations may be through interventions that impact human behaviors occurring there. A second viewpoint considers how we might moderate the negative affects of environmental features through a strategy that reinvests in locations to increase or enhance positive spatial influences of known protective features. This part of a risk reduction strategy focuses on how we could not only remove the aggravating factors at risky places, but also replace them with protective factors, or detractors, of crime.

The Theory of Risky Places also reminds us that risk of illegal behavior is exacerbated when vulnerable places are located near recent past crime incidents. Accordingly, risky places are the product of both vulnerability and exposure. The Theory of Risky Places supports three propositions that weave the notion of spatial influence throughout the concepts of risky features, vulnerable places, and local and global exposures to criminal events. The spatial influences of risky features in the environment contribute to attracting criminal behavior nearby; this is articulated with RTM. The spatial influence of instigator crimes attract near repeats. Such local exposures to crime signals to motivated offenders



that this place is good for (i.e., and influences) the commission of new crimes. When many near repeat crimes occur at an area, hot spots form. Such global patterns of crime inform offender decision-making and influence subsequent illegal behaviors, thereby perpetuating the hot spot. So, the rules that govern criminal behavior are executed on the basis of the spatial influences of risky features, instigator/near repeat crimes, and hot spots. These contributing factors of crime emergence and persistence can be moderated by addressing spatial influences – by focusing on risky features; by forthrightly managing deliberate and stochastic crime events at the most vulnerable places within a fixed period of time; and by preventing the clustering of crime incidents at the most vulnerable places over time.

Crime control is an inherently reactive endeavor for police. But risk management does not have to be. Focusing on spatial influences allows for a more proactive agenda. For instance, police may not have control over every situation in which crime events will occur (and crime is always probable, even in “low crime” jurisdictions). But, among the crime events that are reported and known to police, task managers can control how resources are prioritized, allocated, and instructed to address specific incident locations based on known spatial vulnerabilities and recent past exposures -- in an attempt to prevent future near repeat occurrences.

A risky place is a particular portion of space that is influenced by the factors of spatial vulnerability and local and global information, particularly when they are considered together, rather than in isolation. Such integration is justified by the Theory of Risky Places and is operationalized through analytical methods within an IPIR. With spatial influence as the common thread for measuring and articulating these three elements of risky places, it is also appropriate to make spatial influence the common target of mitigation efforts. That is, **because spatial influence is the measurable link between human behavior and place, it is also the most susceptible to intervention and reform.**

Reducing risk is to reduce spatial influence.

