The Three-D Approach to Space Assessment

The Three-D approach to space assessment provides a simple guide for the layperson to use in determining the appropriateness of how space is designed and used. The Three-D concept is based on the three functions or dimensions of human space:¹

1. All human space has some designated purpose.
2. All human space has social, cultural, legal, or physical definitions that prescribe the desired and acceptable behaviors.
3. All human space is designed to support and control the desired behaviors.

By using the Three-Ds as a guide, space may be evaluated by asking the following types of questions about designation, definition and design:

**Designation**

- What is the designated purpose of this space?
- What was it originally intended use?
- How well does the space support its current use and intended use? Is there conflict?

**Definition**

- How is the space defined?
- Is it clear who owns it?
- Where are its borders?
- Are there social or cultural definitions that affect how that space is used?
- Are the legal or administrative rules clearly set out and reinforced in policy?
- Are there signs?
- Is there conflict or confusion between the designated purpose and definition?
- Define the rules and how they are or will be enforced?

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Design

- How well does the physical design support the intended function?
- How well does the physical design support the definition of the desired or accepted behaviors?
- Does the physical design conflict with or impede the productive use of the space or the proper functioning of the intended human activity? Is there confusion or conflict in the manner in which the physical design is intended to control behavior?
- How well does the space support its current or intended use?
- Is there physiological support for the intended function?
- Is there physiological control of the property, especially problem areas?
- Design space to increase the perception of natural surveillance?

The seven CPTED strategies of territorial reinforcement, natural access control, natural surveillance, image and/or maintenance, activity program support, target hardening and geographical juxtaposition, (wider environment)² are inherent in the Three-D concept. Does the space clearly belong to someone or some group? Is the intended use clearly defined? Does the physical design match the intended use? Does the design provide the means for normal users to naturally control the activities, to control access, and to provide surveillance? Once a basic self-assessment has been conducted, the Three-Ds may then be turned around as a simple means of guiding decisions about what to do with human space. The proper functions have to be matched with space that can support them—effectively support territorial identity, natural access control and surveillance and intended behaviors have to be indisputable and be reinforced in social, cultural, legal, and administrative terms or norms. The design has to ensure that the intended activity can function well.

² Ibid.