

Territoriality

The issue

The degree of safety of a place – public or private – depends considerably on the sense of belonging of the users and their identification with the place, because people respect and protect the places they feel as theirs.

This concept is generally referred to as "territoriality": e.g. the shop owner is likely to intervene if vandalism takes place in front of their shop because they consider this area as their "territory", whereas in an undefined space between large buildings nobody would intervene because it is nobody's territory.

Urban design decisions strongly affect territoriality. For instance, isolated high-rise residential buildings in a large open space or repetitive building-slabs create an environment without identity that people do not feel as theirs. Therefore territoriality should be considered in the early stages of urban design rather than at the stage of detailed design of public spaces.

Public spaces that are out of scale or that lack of identity and character, or that have a poor definition of boundaries, are perceived as nobody's territory; they tend to be avoided in terms of use and neglected in terms of maintenance: this causes lack of spontaneous surveillance and decay.



Simple decorative elements are used here to define the boundary between public and semi-public spaces
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Definition of limits between public, semi-private and private spaces

Public, semi-public and private spaces should be clearly defined in order to be used properly and legitimately, and to allow people to know who is in charge, so that they can efficiently report possible problems. Limits do not necessarily need to be fences; clear symbolic markings are also useful for the purpose.

Feeling of ownership

The character (layout, shape and treatment) of outdoor spaces should induce a feeling of belonging in the users, in order to enhance their feeling of civic responsibility and respect of the place.

In this public space, users feel at ease and relaxed as in their private garden

