

Study shows post-9/11 security zones blight landscape

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A decade after the 9/11 attacks, significant parts of America's most prominent downtowns remain largely sealed off as 'security zones,' but a newly published study by University of Colorado Denver professor Jeremy Németh says this has led to blighted landscapes, limited public access and a need for a new approach to urban planning.

"Our most open, public cities are becoming police states," said Németh, assistant professor of planning and design whose study was recently published in *Environment and Planning A*. "While a certain amount of security is necessary after terror attacks, no amount of anti-terror architecture would have stopped the 9/11 attacks, or the Madrid or London subway bombings. And by limiting access and closing off space, we limit the potential for more 'eyes on the street' to catch possible acts in the process."

But given the reality of continued terror threats like the recent plots to bomb downtown Portland, Ore. and New York City, Németh says 'security zones' must now be considered a new type of land use similar to parks, open space and sidewalks.

"They must be planned and designed in ways that involve the public and are useful to downtown built environments," said Németh, director of the Master of Urban Design Program at the University of Colorado Denver College of Architecture and Planning. "Right now they consist of haphazard placement of metal gates, Jersey barriers and cones, but if these are to become permanent additions to the urban landscapes, we

must understand how to integrate them into the existing built fabric."

Németh's study, the first to compare public and private security districts in more than one city, looked at areas of downtown Los Angeles, New York City and San Francisco and found that while each city values and protects potential targets equally, what is deemed off-limits varies widely.

For example, 35.7 percent of New York's civic center district is within a 'security zone,' meaning it is accessible only to those with proper clearance, while only 3.4 percent of San Francisco's civic center area has the same designation. Meanwhile, 23-acres of public space in Los Angeles sit in a 'security zone.'

Németh said the zones not only affect the appearance of landmark buildings but also reflect an 'architecture of fear' as evidenced, for example, by the bunker-like appearance of embassies and other perceived targets.

Ultimately, he said, these places impart a dual message - simultaneously reassuring the public while causing a sense of unease.

And in the end, their effect could be negligible.

"Indeed, overt security measures may be no more effective than covert intelligence techniques," he said. "But the architecture aims to comfort both property developers concerned with investment risk and residents and tourists with the notion that terror threats are being addressed and that daily life will soon 'return to normal.'"

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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