**REVISED BLOCK ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY**

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**OVERVIEW**

The purpose of this instrument is to measure, as objectively as possible, the physical environment of urban residential blocks. The procedure involves in-person observation by trained raters of three types of environmental cues that have been associated with certain types of crime and other indicators of neighborhood revitalization or decline. The first type of cue includes symbolic signs of social disorder (such as abandoned or unkempt housing, litter and vandalism) and real signs of vulnerability (such as dark and empty streets). Such features have been linked to residents' fear and the quality of neighborhood life.

The second type of cue signals territorial pride, concern, and ownership by residents. These cues are diverse, ranging from "personalization" and upkeep of homes and yards to evidence of organized clean-up and beautification campaigns on the block. Research has found territorial markers to be related, not only to residents' perceptions of safety, but to greater social interaction and sense of community as well as to lesser property violation (including lower burglary rates).

Finally, there are certain characteristics of the built environment that not only reflect and encourage community territoriality and cohesion but also directly inhibit a criminal's ability to strike. Adequate lighting, for example, may make residents feel safer and discourage crime. Fences and hedges may not only reflect pride of ownership, they also may deter entry by criminals. These "defensible space" design features have also been associated with modest, but real, reductions in crime and fear.

The Poplar Grove Environmental Inventory is a product of the authors' previous research on the territorial functioning of urban neighborhoods and residents' reactions to environmental conditions. That research took place in Baltimore and New York City. This instrument is based in part on the Block Booster Environmental Inventory (Perkins et al., 1990, 1993), which was funded by the Ford Foundation and the National Institute of Justice, and the Block Environmental Inventory (Perkins, Meeks, & Taylor, 1992), which was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. Contributing to this version were students in Community and Environmental Change in the FCS Dept. at the University of Utah. Research on the reliability of this version was supported by grant number 98IJCX0022 from the National Institute of Justice.

From the Final Project Report to NIJ (Brown & Perkins, 2001):

**Revised Block Environmental Inventory (BEI**). This study marks the continued development and use of the BEI, the purpose of which is to objectively measure the physical environment of urban residential blocks (Perkins et al., 1992; 1993). The procedure involves in-person observation by trained raters of a variety of residential and nonresidential physical cues associated with crime, fear, and indicators of residential vitality or decline. In addition to the items listed below, the BEI includes a variety of block-level social (number and description of users of outdoor space) and physical (e.g., vacant homes, abandoned cars) features and a detailed ratings checklist on all nonresidential properties on the block. Property-level items (both residential and nonresidential) include defensible space features, such as lighting and barriers, territorial markers and home or yard improvements, and physical signs of decay. Incivilities associated with residential homes included poor roof and paint conditions; poor yard maintenance; and evidence of graffiti and litter (adapted from reliably rated inventories by Brown & Altman, 1983; Perkins, Meeks, & Taylor, 1992; Perkins, Rich, Wandersman, & Taylor, 1993). The RBEI has been used in Perkins, Brown & Taylor (1996), Brown, Perkins & Brown (2003, 2004a&b), and Perkins, Larsen & Brown (2009).

A total of 488 residential properties at Time 1 and 901 at Time 2 were assessed. (15 original addresses were not reassessed because either the building was razed, or the original field address recorded could not be located at Time 2). At least 8 properties per block assessed at Time 1 and at least 12 per block, ideally, at Time 2 (due to some limited block sizes and block mergers, between 9 and 19 properties were actually assessed per block at Time 2).

**Inter-rater reliabilities for observed housing qualities**. Inter-rater agreement has been found to be strong in previous versions of the BEI. After training raters in the same or similar neighborhoods, a selection of target homes were independently rated by two raters at both Time 1 (n = 365) and 2 (n = 201). Resulting inter-rater reliability scores (Cronbach alpha coefficients) yielded acceptable reliability, ranging from .70 to .93 at Time 1 and .92 to 1.00 at Time 2 (See Table 12).

**Table 12. Inter-rater Reliabilities for Observed Housing Qualities**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable name | |  | Reliability | |
| Time 1 | Time 2 | Label | Time 1 | Time 2 |
| ha1  ha2  ha3  ha4  ha5  ha6  ha7  ha8  ha9  ha10  ha11  ha12  ha13  ha14  ha15  ha16  ha17  ha18  ha19 | T2H1  T2H2  T2H3  T2H4  T2H5  T2H6  T2H7  T2H8  T2H9  T2H10  T2H11  T2H12  T2H13  T2H14  T2H15  T2H16  T2H17  T2H18  T2H19 | barrier  roof condition  traces  litter  peel paint  lights  trees  personal id  decorations  graffiti  broken windows  cracked brick  bad lawn  security bars  dog  alarm  garden  improvements  seating | .87  .71  .82  .87  .90  .84  .92  .70  .82  .87  .83  .79  .84  .83  .93  .77  .79  .80  .83 | .93  .93  .92  .94  .96  .98  .97  .98  .98  .99  .98  .98  .99  1.00  .99  .99  .98  .98  .99 |

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Perkins, D.D., Wandersman, A., Rich, R.C., & Taylor, R.B. (1993). The physical environment of street crime: Defensible space, territoriality and incivilities. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 13*, 29-49. **REVISED BLOCK ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY**

INSTRUCTIONS

A general comment must be stressed at the outset. Problems with confusing block boundaries, with occasional errors in filling out the inventory and with the inventory itself, such as classification ambiguities, are bound to arise. The success of the project depends on such issues being brought into the open as they come up and not resolved independently by each observer or team. Thus, when you have a question about the boundaries of a block or about how to code something, or feel that a category or question is either unclear or inadequate (in that it misses important information), it is critical that you do the following:

1. **Do not discuss how you rated something with your teammate until after you have both recorded that rating. DO NOT change any completed ratings** based on such conversations. BEFORE discussing an item with your teammate, check the following directions, project maps and other materials. The issue may have come up previously in which case there should already be an unequivocal answer spelled out.
2. If you still have any question about the correct course of action and your supervisor is available, ask him/her to help resolve the issue before proceeding.
3. If all of the above are unavailable, write down your thoughts and observations clearly and bring them to the attention of Dr. Perkins at a later time. The decision will have to be based on your notes and recollections and so, to avoid a special trip back to the block in question, try to be as careful as possible. You will be acting as the investigators' eyes and ears, in a very real sense. And, in general, your ideas will be quite helpful in making this project a successful endeavor.
4. If the issue cannot wait and there is no way of contacting any of the above, you must discuss the issue with your teammate and any other available project members and make the decision yourselves. Write down thoroughly the rationale for the decision.

Talk to your designated assessment partner and schedule a time to do your data collection. You do not have to do all 3 of your assigned blocks in one visit, but **all assessments must be done between 5 PM and 8 PM on a weeknight OR between noon and 8 PM on a Saturday or Sunday.**

What to take to conduct an assessment:

1. A copy of these instructions.
2. Environmental Inventory forms (including a couple extra copies in case you have to start over).
3. A detailed street map of the entire area with your assigned blocks clearly identified.
4. A clipboard or notebook and several sharpened pencils.
5. Extra copies of the PGEI Overview to offer anyone who asks what you are doing (if this happens, after the person leaves, note what was said and where it occurred, including the exact address if possible). Try to answer their questions and please be as polite as possible-- we will be surveying sample homes from the same blocks you are assessing.

The following is a brief description of the questions in the Environmental Inventory. It is important to review these instructions and the checklist itself thoroughly before going to the field site so any questions can be answered. Finally, check to see that the street name, block number, and cross streets have been filled in.

When you arrive at the designated block

First, when you get to an assigned block, check carefully to make sure that the street signs match the stated boundaries on the checklist and on the map. The block includes both sides of the street and the properties on all adjacent corners (including corner properties facing side streets, but not corner properties across boundary streets). When you are sure you're at the correct block, fill in the exact starting time.

**I. Social Environment**

As soon as you have recorded the time, conduct Part I (i.e., of all people anywhere outdoors on the block over a one-minute period). It is important to do this first so as to avoid counting those who might come outdoors because of your presence. (If someone does ask what you are doing at any time (not just during Part I), summarize what is said in one of the comments sections on page 2 and write down the address you are closest to and, if different, the address they came from.) It is important for you and your partner to do this at precisely the same time. Try to choose a vantage point where you can see the entire block (e.g., near middle of block). **Please be as discreet as possible**. Try to guess the sex and approximate age of each person, even if it is difficult to do so. Briefly describe their behavior. Circle or put in brackets individuals you have listed who are engaged in some group activity. If someone is doing the identical behavior of the person listed above them, you may use " " to indicate "same."

**II. Block Physical Environment**

When the minute is up and you have finished section I, go up and down the block once (either by foot or car) keeping a tally of all the items in section II. Use the dotted area for the tally and the right\_hand lines for the exact total. At the bottom of this section, check whether the block has sidewalks and curbs and gutters.

1. Count a car as abandoned if it does not appear to be drivable (i.e., has shattered windows, dismantled parts, has been in a wreck, or has one or more flat or missing tires).

2-3. Damaged or graffiti painted public property would include signs, street lights, street trees, fire hydrants, etc. Count graffiti only if it is a painted name, design, or a mark that you could not cover with one hand. Count damage or graffiti just once per vandalized object (i.e., do not count multiple marks on a sign or the sign separately from its post).

4. Street lights include both high traffic lights and low pedestrian lamps. If the light is broken, count it under #2, but not here.

5. An unboarded abandoned building is not only vacant, but is dilapidated, has overgrown grass, weeds or shrubbery, or several broken windows.

6. "Boarded abandoned buildings" need not look dilapidated.

7. "For sale" or "Sold" signs may be on lawn or window of either private or commercial property.

8. Do not count ordinary corner street signs as neighborhood, block or block watch "identifiers" (rather, they will typically read "Welcome to ... block" or "This block protected by...").

9. "Street" trees or shrubs are on the "right of way", which includes the strip between the sidewalk and the street and is public property.

10. Count a pothole if it is bigger than your foot. Do not count cracks.

**III. Individual Property Physical Environment:**

At the top of the second page, start over at the beginning of the block (starting with the lowest number address), walk down one side of the street and then the other, filling out sections **A (All Nonresidential land uses)** and **B (Residential Property Sample)** simultaneously. For most items in Section III, unless otherwise indicated, write 1 for "yes", 2 for "no." Some items ask instead for an exact number ("How many...") or percentage ("What %..."). You may go onto the property, if necessary, for part A, but try to avoid stepping onto residential property (Part B). Use the space provided and, if necessary, additional pages, for any comments or questions you might have and note the category number, letter and, where appropriate, address it refers to.

For Part A, write down the address (just the number) of every nonresidential land use on the block and classify the type. For open land uses, such as parks, and large institutional (e.g., church, school) yards, give the range of possible addresses (ex: "601-699 South 1000 West"). So as to avoid confusion, be sure to use the correct abbreviation: STore, OFfice, Church, SChool, ParK, Parking LoT, PLayground, Garden, Empty, OTher. If "OT" describe by address under comments. If mixed use, indicate each in bottom to top order (e.g., ground floor is a store and upper floor(s) are residential (ST/R) or offices (ST/OF)). It is especially important to note "eyesores," such as vacant lots ("E") with abandoned cars, overgrown lawns, etc.

For Part B, start with the lowest number address of a private home, walk down one side of the street at a time and, if there are 8 or fewer residential properties on the entire block, fill out Part B for every property. If there are more than 8 residential properties, evaluate every third house or apartment building. That is, skip two each time: e.g., you might do address #600, #606, #612, etc. (If no #600, you would do #601, #607, #613; or if the numbers run 600, 604, 608..., you would choose #600, 612, 624...). Stop when you have completed part B on 8 properties. If you finish the block and have not assessed at least 8 properties, start over and do the second (#02), fifth (#08), and eighth (#14) properties, etc., until you have completed 8. If you complete 8 properties for B before the end of the block, don't forget to look for nonresidential properties (Part A) on the rest of the block. When you finish a block, record the time at the top of the front page. Items 2-15 in Part A are identical to those in Part B and so will be explained just once:

2. Observing from sidewalk, indicate: 0 if there are no "traces" of people present at that address; 1 if you see any inanimate objects that have been left by someone outside (e.g., car in driveway, toy or tool on lawn or porch) but no "animate" traces; 2 if you see or hear any people (incl. television or stereo on) inside or outside at that address.

3. Imagine if all street (up to half way across), sidewalk, and yard litter (including overflow from trash cans) were swept up; if you could not cover up the pile with 1 foot, indicate 1 (yes).

4. Count graffiti only if it is a painted name, design, or a mark that you could not cover with one hand. Count damage or graffiti just once per vandalized object (i.e., do not count multiple marks on a garage door).

5. Include as broken windows that are visibly cracked; these sometimes have tape along the cracks. Broken fixtures to look for include exterior lights and "personalizations" (see #16, below).

6. Include any unpatched cracks or broken sections of brick, stucco, sidewalk, or driveway that are at least one foot long.

7. Estimate the percentage of the surface of all exterior paint (including trim) that is cracked or peeling).

8. Indicate yes (1) if there is at least 1 square yard of lawn that is either higher than 6 inches (about your thumb to forefinger spread wide), or brown, or has more than just 1 or 2 visible weeds.

9. Count the number of unbroken outdoor **lights** on the property (i.e., not street lamps). Look near front door, porch, garage, and sidewalk.

10. Include any type of **window barrier**. Check front and side windows, doors, and especially basement windows.

11. Any evidence of a **dog** living there (dog house, "beware of dog" sign or droppings on the lawn. Do not count droppings along street or sidewalk.

12. Look for various **"security" signs** (e.g., alarm, "Operation I.D.," patrol, or "block watch" stickers) on doors and windows near doors. If you see an alarm or its wires, code this a 1 (yes).

13. Count the number of **trees** (of any size) on private property and visible from the street.

14. Include anything that appears to be intended as a **garden**, unless it is an empty bed.

15. A "stoop" (front steps) should be included if the steps or low wall are at a comfortable height for sitting (2\_3 feet).

16. A "**barrier**" is a wall, fence, or hedge of any sort or height. 0 if none; 1 if it surrounds just part of property (e.g., backyard perimeter only); 2 if around the perimeter of the entire property.

17. **"Personalization signs"** include family names, initials, emblems, ornaments, fancy address signs (but not regular address numbers). Look for these on doors, mail boxes, lampposts, welcome mats, windows, and gates and record the total number.

18. **Decorations** include any statuettes, planters, window boxes, awnings, etc., that were not counted in 16. Do not include plants inside windows. Again, record the exact number.

19. **Home improvements** include current or recent construction additions, such as a new garage or car port, porch or deck, addition (room), aluminum siding, driveway resurfacing, landscaping, etc.

20. Indicate by first initial whether the **roof** appears to be New (or is being replaced), in Average condition, or in obvious need of Repair (e.g., missing shingles).

**REVISED BLOCK ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY**

Date: m\_\_\_\_\_d\_\_\_\_\_y\_\_\_\_\_\_ Time started:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_AM/PM Time finished:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Street name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 100 Block:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Cross streets:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Rater\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Rater number:#\_\_ \_\_ digit 1 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 2 o o o o o o o o o o

Block number:#\_\_ \_\_ digit 1 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 2 o o o o o o o o o o

**I. Social Environment:** List each person by sex who are outside on street or private property at any time for one minute. Estimate age & briefly describe their behavior. Bracket on right groups that are together. DO NOT WRITE CLOSE TO DOTS! Use reverse side for additional comments.

BEHAVIOR (P=pedestrian; W=working; H=hanging

SEX AGE 10- 15- 20- 30- out; O=Other activity)

M F <10 14 19 29 59 60+ P W H O Comments (use reverse if nec.)

o o o o o o o o o o o o 1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 4.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 5.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 6.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 7.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 8.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o o o o 9.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

10. If > 9, how many total? What are the others doing?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18+

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

o o o o o o o o o

**II. Block Physical Environment:** Yes No

11. Does the block have **sidewalks**?........ o o

12. Does the block have **curbs and gutters**? o o

How many of the following are on the whole block? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+

1. **Abandoned** (undrivable, damaged) **cars** on street. o o o o o o o o o

2. **Damage on street property**, broken street lights o o o o o o o o o

3. **Graffiti** on street property (incl. signs)...... o o o o o o o o o

4. **Unbroken street lights**......................... o o o o o o o o o

5. **Unboarded abandoned buildings** (not just vacant) o o o o o o o o o

6. **Boarded abandoned buildings**.................... o o o o o o o o o

7. **"For sale" signs**............................... o o o o o o o o o

8. Block, neighborhood or crime watch **signs**....... o o o o o o o o o

9. **Trees or shrubs on the "right of way"**.......... o o o o o o o o o

10. **Potholes** in the street........................ o o o o o o o o o

**[COPY THIS PAGE AS MANY TIMES AS NEEDED]**

**III. Individual Property Physical Environment:** Block #:\_\_ \_\_ Rater #:\_\_ \_\_

**A. All nonresidential land uses**. ST OF C SC PK PL PG G E OT

**Type:** STore, OFfice, Church, SChool, ParK,

Parking Lot, PlayGround, Garden, Empty, Other o o o o o o o o o o

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**Address:** digit 1 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 2 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 3 o o o o o o o o o o

Indicate how many of the following: digit 4 o o o o o o o o o o

1. **Barrier**: 0=none; 1=on property; 2=perimeter.. o o o o o o o o o o

3. **Traces of people**:0=none,1=inanimate,2=animate o o o o o o o o o o

4. Pieces of **litter** on & in front of property... o o o o o o o o o o

5. % exterior **paint peeling** X 10 (1=10%,2=20)... o o o o o o o o o o

6. Unbroken **outdoor lights** on the property...... o o o o o o o o o o

7. **Trees** on the property........................ o o o o o o o o o o

Indicate no or yes: No Yes

10. Any **graffiti** on property?............................ o o

11. Any **broken windows** **or fixtures** **(incl. lights)**?....... o o

12. Any **cracked brick, concrete** **(incl. driveway, sidewalk)**? o o

13. Is **lawn** in poor condition (>6in., brown, weeds)?..... o o

14. Do any windows or doors have **security bars or gates**?. o o

15. Any sign of a **dog** (e.g., house, droppings, "beware")? o o

16. Any **security, alarm, property ID,** **block watch signs**?. o o

17. Any **flower or vegatable garden** on the property?...... o o

19. Any**place to sit** outside (bench, swing, stoop)?....... o o

**[COPY THIS PAGE AS MANY TIMES AS NEEDED]**

**III. Individual Property Physical Environment:** Block #:\_\_ \_\_ Rater #:\_\_ \_\_

**B. Sampled Residential Properties** (all addresses in sample list)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**Address:** digit 1 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 2 o o o o o o o o o o

digit 3 o o o o o o o o o o

Indicate how many of the following: digit 4 o o o o o o o o o o

1. **Barrier**: 0=none; 1=on property; 2=perimeter.. o o o o o o o o o o

2. **Roof** condition: 0=new,1=avg,2=needs repair... o o o o o o o o o o

3. **Traces of people**:0=none,1=inanimate,2=animate o o o o o o o o o o

4. Pieces of **litter** on & in front of property... o o o o o o o o o o

5. % exterior **paint peeling** X 10 (1=10%,2=20)... o o o o o o o o o o

6. Unbroken **outdoor lights** on the property...... o o o o o o o o o o

7. **Trees** on the property........................ o o o o o o o o o o

8. **Personalizations** on the property............. o o o o o o o o o o

9. House, yard or window **decorations**............ o o o o o o o o o o

Indicate no or yes: No Yes

10. Any **graffiti** on property?............................ o o

11. Any **broken windows** **or fixtures** **(incl. lights)**?....... o o

12. Any **cracked brick, concrete** **(incl. driveway, sidewalk)**? o o

13. Is **lawn** in poor condition (>6in., brown, weeds)?..... o o

14. Do any windows or doors have **security bars or gates**?. o o

15. Any sign of a **dog** (e.g., house, droppings, "beware")? o o

16. Any **security, alarm, property ID,** **block watch signs**?. o o

17. Any **flower or vegatable garden** on the property?...... o o

18. Any current or recent **home improvements**?............. o o

19. Any**place to sit** outside (bench, swing, stoop)?....... o o