

Police Perspectives of CPTED

Presented by

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Lost in implementation: NSW police force crime prevention officer perspectives on crime prevention through environmental design

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Abstract Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is practiced by various professions and agencies in many jurisdictions. The role police play in CPTED has received limited scrutiny from academics within Australia (and other countries). This article makes an important contribution to addressing this gap in the literature through providing New South Wales Police Force Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) perspectives on their role in reviewing council development applications from a CPTED perspective. Findings show police-council relations vary considerably. Some police-council areas have clear policies in place to enable police to contribute to reviewing crime risks of development applications, whilst others do not. Many police feel their engagement in the planning and development process is often tokenistic, receiving limited feedback from councils about their recommendations. For these police, they see little ongoing relevance of reviewing development applications. If police are to remain involved, there is a need to develop clearer parameters of how police will contribute and what they can realistically be expected to contribute to this process.

Keywords Police · Crime prevention officers · CPTED · Planning · Crime risk assessments · Development application · NSW

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Builds on Previous Research

- Clancey, G., Monchuk, L., Anderson, J., Ellis, J. (2018). Lost in Implementation: NSW Police Force Crime Prevention Officer Perspectives on Crime Prevention through Environmental Design. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal*. 10.1057/s41300-018-0043-x
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S79C Guidelines

- *Crime prevention and the assessment of development applications: Guidelines under section 79c of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*
 - These guidelines were intended to “help identify crime risk and minimize opportunities for crime through the appropriate assessment of development proposals” (DUAP, 2001: 1).
 - “Councils have an obligation to ensure that a development provides safety and security to users and the community” (emphasis in original) (DUAP, 2001: 2). Where a development presents a crime risk, the “guidelines can be used to justify:
 - Modification of the development to minimize the risk of crime; or
 - Refusal of the development on the grounds that crime risk cannot be appropriately minimized” (DUAP, 2001: 2).
 - The guidelines contain two parts – Part A describes a crime risk assessment, while Part B outlines key crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles (2 pages). Councils should consider the principles outlined in Part B when assessing all developments.

Guidance for Crime Risk Assessments - Part A

- Part A defines a crime risk assessment as being a “systematic evaluation of the potential for crime in an area. It provides an indication of both the likely magnitude of crime and likely crime type. The consideration of these dimensions (crime amount and types) will determine the choice and appropriate mix of CPTED strategies” (DUAP, 2001: 3).
- There are two key steps when assessing crime risk:
 1. obtain an understanding of the crime risk of the area, and if required
 2. apply (CPTED) treatments that correspond with levels of risk present in the area” (DUAP, 2001: 3).
- A formal crime risk assessment is needed for any development that is likely (in the council’s opinion) to create a risk of crime. Examples would include:
 - a new/refurbished shopping centre or transport interchange
 - a large scale residential development (more than 20 new dwellings), or
 - the development or re-development of a mall or other public place, including the installation of new street furniture.
- A crime risk assessment is a systematic evaluation of the potential for crime in an area. It provides an indication of both the likely magnitude of crime and likely crime type. The consideration of these dimensions (crime amount and type) will determine the choice and appropriate mix of CPTED strategies.

Current Study

- Data sources: a short survey and four focus groups with a total of 36 NSW Police Force (NSWPF) Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) (predominantly from the Sydney metropolitan area).
- The sample comprised a total of 36 CPOs all of whom were sworn police officers:
 - 5 Constables and 31 Senior Constables
 - 17 were female, 16 were male (3 responses were missing)
 - They had been employed by the NSW Police Force between three and 29 years (mean = 11) - 19 stated that they had been in the post for over three years, with the remainder of the 17 CPOs stating that they had been in the post for three years or less.
 - 28 were full-time; 5 were part-time and 3 were back-ups and spent little time undertaking CPO work
- Research conducted in November 2017 at NSWPF Headquarters.
- Focus groups recorded and professionally transcribed.

NSW Police CPO Involvement in Reviewing DAs

- 86% (n=31) indicated that councils do request they review DAs from a crime prevention perspective, while 14% (n=5) CPOs stated that their councils do not involve them in reviewing DAs.
- Of those that are requested by their councils to review DAs, 11% (n=4) CPOs indicated that they are always involved in reviewing DAs; 50% (n=18) are involved most of the time and 25% (n=9) stated that they are only involved in reviewing a few.
- DCPs:
 - 50% (n=18) CPOs said that their councils had a DCP
 - 33% (n=12) were unsure
 - 4% (n=5) stated that they did not and 3% (n=1) response was missing.
- MoUs:
 - 81% of CPOs (n=29) stated that there is a MoU between their PAC and council/councils
 - 14% (n=5) were unsure if there was an MoU in place between their PAC and local councils
 - 6% (n=2) indicated that there was no MoU in place - “MoUs? I’ve never seen one” (Group 2).

Most MOUs should cut down on the types [of DAs] we get. There should be standard, this is what we're getting, we've got 100 or more units, we don't want circuses, we don't want cemeteries...I don't want the house with the veranda coming my way, no need. We could all get hundreds of DAs if the floodgates opened. (Group 2)

Quality of PAC and Council Relationships

- PAC/Council relationships differ across Sydney (and presumably across NSW). Some participants stated that they are in frequent contact with their local council planning officers, regularly sent DAs for review and are invited to attend crime prevention committee meetings.
- Many CPOs described how they felt that reviewing DAs was merely a ‘tick-box exercise’ as the councils had to be seen to be seeking the views of the police as a means of executing their duty under the Section 79c guidelines and to mitigate against any future repercussions:
 - *It's just ticking boxes to say we've spoken to the police, tick, tick, tick, done. (Group 3)*
 - *I think it's an arse covering exercise where they can say if it turns pear shaped, well we asked the police about it. (Group 4)*
- The majority of participants stated that they receive very little feedback from the councils as to whether their recommendations were implemented:
 - *...you don't even see the final product, so you've got no idea whether what you've recommended has come in and you're recommending on something that's a drawing, essentially. (Group 1)*
 - *...we're just ticking boxes because they don't take on board anything you say...Police words are worth nothing, they don't care. (Group 3)*

Utility of Police Involvement in Reviewing DAs

- Given some of the tensions and challenges highlighted, focus group participants were asked whether police should be involved in reviewing DAs. Responses ranged between those in favour and those in opposition. Nonetheless, it was clear that a great number of CPOs considered their involvement tokenistic and of little or no utility:
 - *It's not a police role... Why am I investing my time in that [DAs] when the crime prevention that I'm employed to do, I actually then look at what my general duties staff are doing and going 'they're attending this way more than they should', so I'm going to focus my crime prevention duties on that and reduce why they're attending there, because it's a tick in the box for here, and I'm really not interested. (Group 4)*
 - *You're spending 10 or 20 hours on some of these DAs and at the end of the day, when it goes through, they don't have to follow through with the recommendations that we put forward, so why are we spending 10 or 20 hours of police time doing this paperwork? (Group 2)*
 - *I think the whole thing is pointless from a police perspective... you kind of think what's the point? You put a lot of work into it and you kind of think, well if nobody's going to give me feedback, what's the use of putting my time and energy into that when I could be out doing something else? (Group 4)*
- Some CPOs had opposing views – they felt that the police were best placed to comment on crime risk as they were privy to data and intelligence not available in the public domain. CPOs stated that this local knowledge is imperative when providing specific recommendations.
 - *I think we need to keep on doing them. I think that, as I said it may not be immediate, but I think if we were to say right we won't do any more response to DAs I would hate to think. I reckon crime would start to rise a little bit more. (Group 3)*

Concluding Thoughts

- Over numerous small projects, we have highlighted limitations of the existing Guidelines and arrangements in NSW. Previous studies raised concerns about:
 - Limitations of Guidelines including folly of relying on four CPTED principles which are not relevant to all developments and some are future-oriented
 - Council planners noted that they often received comments from police that were outside of statutory timeframes and outside of what they could act on (i.e. intelligence)
 - Crime prevention consultants noted the lateness of their involvement and some of the challenges of maintaining independence
- The most recent study highlights the frequently negative experiences of NSWPF CPOs in reviewing DAs and preparing associated reports.
- At best, much activity in this area seems tokenistic/performative – developer engages a consultant with a view to virtually endorsing proposed plans; consultant prepares a report focused on generally narrow range of CPTED issues; council sends DA to police for review; police review but provide comments that councils cannot use; so the development proceeds largely as proposed:

“governments, under pressure not to impede investment by imposing additional burdens on the private sector ... are likely to be reluctant to require CPTED assessment as a routine part of the development approval process” (Sutton et al, 2008: 68)

Thank You

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