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Crime prevention through environmental design in New South Wales

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ABSTRACT

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) involves the manipulation of the built environment to reduce crime risks. The introduction of the *Crime Prevention and the Assessment of Development Applications: Guidelines under Section 79c of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (S79c Guidelines) stimulated work in this area in New South Wales (NSW) in April 2001. While the S79c Guidelines have never been formally evaluated, a growing body of research projects have been conducted that shed some light on contemporary CPTED practice in NSW. Taken together, the findings arising from this research suggest that there has been an increased acknowledgement of CPTED in planning circles, but there have been numerous implementation challenges. The Guidelines speak little to built environment professionals and provide limited guidance to consent authorities; crime risk assessments are generally undertaken late in the development process; and operational policing issues have in some instances undermined police-council liaison. After reviewing these and other key implementation challenges, a series of recommendations are made to improve CPTED practice in NSW.

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Introduction

There is widespread recognition that many countries (including Australia) experienced significant increases in crime in the latter half of last century (Felson and Cohen 1980; Garland 2001; Weatherburn 2004; Zimring 2006; van Dijk 2008). Garland (2001, 90) noted that the number of crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales doubled between 1955 and 1964, doubled again by 1975, and once again by 1990. Similar trends were also observed in the USA, where crime rates rose sharply from 1960, reaching their peak in the early 1980s at a rate three times than that 20 years before (Garland 2001). In Australia, between 1973/1974 and 1988/1989, the recorded rates of various crimes increased substantially: the rate of household break-and-enter rose by 144%, motor vehicle theft rose by 105%, robbery rose 126%, and the recorded rate of serious assault increased by 376% (Weatherburn 2004, 12).

Governments (and others) responded to this 'massive and incontestable social fact' (Garland 2001, 90) in diverse ways. New methods to prevent crime emerged during this period in the shadow of traditional criminal justice responses. Attention turned from rehabilitating the offender to reducing the opportunities for crime (Cohen and Felson 1979). Leading to what would become known as situational crime prevention, this approach to crime has been shown to be effective at preventing diverse offences through the manipulation of the situations in which it occurs (Clarke 1980, 1997; Cornish and Clarke 1986). Improved lighting

(Farrington and Welsh 2002), the use of time-delay safes (Eck 2002), dye canisters in automated teller machines (ATMs) to mark money if an ATM is moved (Prenzler 2009), and the use of Electronic Article Surveillance to protect valuable retail items (Eck 2002) are just some examples of common situational crime prevention techniques that are routinely employed today.

Resonating with this movement towards situational crime prevention was a focus on the impact of the built environment on crime. Similar to the growing focus upon the impact of the built environment on climate change and other domains (Eliasson 2000), architects, planners, urban designers, police, and others began to acknowledge the potentially criminogenic features of the built environment (Jacobs 1961; Jeffrey 1971; Newman 1972; Wilson and Kelling 1982). Despite the somewhat disparate perspectives of the professionals involved, this approach generally has come to be known as crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). CPTED is defined as 'the proper design and effective use of the built environment' which 'can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life' (Crowe 2000, 46).

CPTED generally is taken to consist of a number of key principles or approaches. Commonly these include surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement, and space management. *Surveillance* means that people can see what others are doing, which will deter would-be offenders from committing crime. Surveillance can

be enhanced by providing clear sightlines, effective lighting, and landscaping that reduce spots where offenders can hide or entrap victims (Jacobs 1961). *Access control* involves the use of physical or symbolic barriers to attract, channel, or restrict the movement of people. Access control can be achieved through landscaping, fencing, turnstiles, entry-phones, and other forms of technology that manage access to particular locations (Atlas 2008). *Territorial reinforcement* denotes ownership (Newman 1972). Well-maintained properties with clearly defined purposes send cues to would-be offenders that a level of capable guardianship (Cohen and Felson 1979) is exercised. Providing a sense of ownership over an area encourages responsibility to be taken for managing the area and intervening if problems arise. Finally, *space management* pertains to sustaining attractive, well-maintained, and well-used spaces. Activity coordination, site cleanliness, rapid repair of vandalism and graffiti, the replacement of burned out lighting, and the removal or refurbishment of decayed physical elements are all examples of space management (DUAP 2001, 5).

In the decades since its initial emergence, CPTED has gained increasing acceptance (Geason and Wilson 1989; Cozens, Saville, and Hiller 2005; Minnery and Lim 2005; Atlas 2008; Fisher and Piracha 2012; Cozens 2014). Many police, local authority staff, private consultants, and others involved in maintaining order in the built environment now receive CPTED training (McCamley 2001; Klepczarek 2002; McDonald and Kitteringham 2004; Cozens, Thorn, and Hillier 2008; Book and Schneider 2010), and CPTED practitioner professional associations have emerged (e.g. the International CPTED Association). Many jurisdictions now employ rating systems to quantify safety and security for some forms of built environment (e.g. the Secured by Design accreditation process in the UK), and numerous jurisdictions have adopted planning guidelines incorporating CPTED design principles, both internationally (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004; New Zealand Ministry of Justice 2005; Scottish Executive Planning Department 2006) and across Australia (Australian Capital Territory Government 2000; South Australian Department of Transport and Urban 2004; Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment 2005; Western Australian Planning Commission 2006; Queensland Government 2007).

CPTED in New South Wales

Consistent with these trends, CPTED is now part of the New South Wales (NSW) planning landscape, most specifically through the enactment of the *Crime Prevention and the Assessment of Development Applications: Guidelines under Section 79c of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (S79c Guidelines) in April 2001. These guidelines

were intended to 'help councils identify crime risk and minimize opportunities for crime through the appropriate assessment of development proposals' (DUAP 2001, 1). The guidelines suggest that '*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 (CRA; 1 page, 356 words), while Part B outlines key CPTED principles (2 pages, 659 words). Councils should consider the principles outlined in Part B when assessing all developments.

The guidelines require formal CRAs for any development deemed by the council to pose crime risks, including 'a new/refurbished shopping centre or transport interchange, a large scale residential development (more than 20 dwellings), or the development/redevelopment of a mall or other public place, including the installation of new street furniture' (DUAP 2001, 2). The guidelines also advise that 'typically, crime risk assessments are conducted in cooperation with trained local police' (DUAP 2001, 2), and they encourage councils and police to develop a local consultation protocol stipulating which developments would require a formal CRA.

Part B of the guidelines essentially provides definitions and examples of four CPTED principles to be used in the assessment of development applications to minimise the opportunity for crime (DUAP 2001, 4). These principles are surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and space management (described previously).

The introduction of these guidelines was supported by the introduction of the *Safer by Design* course delivered by the NSW Police Service (now NSW Police Force). This training (originally 10 days in duration, but now reduced to four days in recent years) covers the following topics: criminology and crime prevention; historical applications of CPTED; identifying crime risk in architectural plans and drawings; lighting, fear, and crime; crime risk management and CPTED applications; and councils, planning, and design safety (McCamley 2001).

To gain an understanding of aspects of CPTED practice in NSW, a small number of research projects were undertaken between 2012 and 2015. After briefly describing the research methods adopted for each research project, drawing on these data, some of key

findings arising from these research projects will be presented and discussed in relation to each other.

Research methodology

To date, the present research team has undertaken (with colleagues Lee and Rutherford) three key research projects focusing on CPTED in NSW:

- (1) Analysis of 33 CRA reports;
- (2) Interviews with 10 planners from different Sydney councils; and
- (3) Interviews with seven private consultants engaged in the development of CRA reports in NSW.

The first of these research projects examined all available CRAs submitted between 1 January 2007 and 31 October 2010. Under section 3A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, developments that have been designated as a 'major project' are published in the NSW Department of Planning's active tracking system. All of these applications are publicly accessible at <http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au>.

Drawing on these public reports, a purposive criterion sampling technique was used (Neuman 2006). From the total overall sample of major project reports from this time period, a total of 33 projects had available CRAs reports and provided the sample for this study. The content of these 33 CRA reports was subjected to content analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Neuman 2006). This analytic procedure included categorisation of the source and volume of the content that constitutes CRA reports, and the critical analysis of the commentary and recommendations contained in the reports.¹

The second branch of research involved semi-structured interviews with a sample of planning staff from Sydney local councils. The interviews focused on council procedures to assess crime risks, relationships with local police and their involvement in identifying crime risks in proposed developments, and CPTED training provided to planning staff. The data gathered from these interviews were then systematically coded and analysed. The responses of the 10 respondents were thematically compared to each other in order to discern the nature of any patterns and differences emerging.²

In the third branch of this research, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven private consultants representing six consultancy firms from across NSW. These interviewees were asked how many CRA reports that they had compiled, along with a series of semi-structured questions that aimed to analyse their perspectives on the incorporation of CPTED within the development application process. The majority of interviewees have extensive

experience in this area of work, having compiled in some cases hundreds of CRA reports.³

Findings

The key findings from these research projects will be discussed using four main themes: (1) CRA reports; (2) the efficacy of the S79s Guidelines; (3) planning consent; and (4) police involvement. Following discussion of these findings, recommendations will be provided to address the existing limitations.

CRA reports

Through the initial analysis of 33 CRA reports and the series of interviews with consultants who drafted them, it became clear that there are generally a number of elements that constitute a 'good' CRA report. These elements include:

- Conducting site audit(s);
- Analysing crime and demographic data;
- Assessing architectural plans;
- Liaising with local stakeholders; and
- Preparing the report.

The content analysis of the CRA reports themselves highlighted that reports often did not include all of these elements. For example, the following are some of the findings from the analysis of the content of the CRA reports:

- Some form of crime data was presented for only 16 of the 33 reports (48.5%);
- Eleven of the 33 reports (33.3%) made reference to a site visit (or visits) during the preparation of the report;
- Thirteen of the 33 reports (39.4%) made reference to stakeholders being consulted during the preparation of the CRA report;
- Twenty-three of the 33 reports (69.7%) made explicit reference to architectural plans of the proposed development;
- Seventeen of the 33 reports (51.5%) included recommendations about how crime risks could be mitigated or managed; and
- Seven of the 33 reports (21.2%) contained adverse findings.

Another factor that undermined the utility of some of these reports was the nature of the content included in the reports. The length of the reports (not including appendices) ranged from two pages to 35 pages, with an average of 11.5 pages. This meant that, generally speaking, the reports were not especially detailed, and given that all reports included generic CPTED

information, the space devoted to crime risk analyses was further diminished.

In some instances, a significant proportion of the reports was dedicated to the explanation of key CPTED concepts. One company responsible for preparing two reports (Reports 18 and 30) included approximately four pages of information on CPTED on both reports. These pages contain information about the history of CPTED and explanations of key principles. To demonstrate the breadth of terrain covered, the following are key excerpts:

Crime prevention has been linked to urban design since the late 1970s. The concept originated in the United States and Canada when sociologists, criminologists and architects began to link criminal behaviour in public spaces with poor design and layout of those spaces ... Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, State and local authorities within Australia, responsible for urban development approvals, have been gradually adopting the CPTED or similar crime prevention (design) concepts when approving both large and small scale development applications. (Report 30, 19)

All reports contained more or less the same information (although such a discursive historical review of CPTED as the above was rare). Many reports paraphrased or reproduced information contained within the NSW guidelines. While it could be argued that it is beneficial to have some agreed-upon understanding of CPTED and its relevant terms and concepts, the provision of lengthy, standard descriptions of CPTED could also serve to unnecessarily extend the length of these reports.

In the case of one company that was responsible for four of the sampled reports, each report reviewed was identical, with the sole exception of the reference to the location of the proposed development. Far from engaging with the specific contexts and needs of each site as suggested by Kent and Wheeler (2015), these reports appeared to focus exclusively on what was minimally required to be contained within these documents.

While each of these reports was drafted for residential developments, therefore making it vaguely possible that the same design was used in each case, it does raise questions regarding the utility of providing generic CRA reports. The four proposed residential developments differed in size and location, but given that there were no detailed references to the architectural plans in the CRA reports, it is difficult to determine the validity of submitting a near-standard report as part of the development application.

In the most recent project, the CRA interviewees were also asked about the point in the development process their services were engaged and the timeframes they were given to prepare a CRA report. Responses varied between respondents, but typically, it was suggested that they would be brought in at an advanced

stage of the development application process and that they were granted a period of either one to two weeks or three to four weeks to prepare the report. In only one case did the interviewee note that they tended to be engaged during the initial phase of a development application, and this was attributed to the involvement of the interviewee's company in preliminary planning documentation for their clients. This afforded opportunities to identify whether a CRA report would be required. This early involvement was generally regarded as optimal by all CRA interviewees, as it provided the greatest opportunity to influence initial designs.

Some of the consultants raised the maintenance of independence as a key concern. A central tension of developing CRA reports is the independence of the consultant preparing the report. Given that the consultant is contracted by the client whose goal is to develop a particular site, it is highly likely that pressure (overt or covert) will be brought to bear on the consultant to produce a favourable report.

CRA Interviewee #01 highlighted this tension:

The other issue we face all the time ... It's certainly relevant to us and that is our independence. The clients are not sure; they think we're working for them as other consultants do in submitting a report in support of the development ... we are very clear about our independence. (CRA Interviewee #01)

While there were some differences in the responses from the interviewees, this issue of the independence of those preparing CRA reports warrants further exploration. Taken together, these findings highlight some practices that undermine the utility of these CRA reports. The often generic content of the reports, the lack of adverse findings and clear recommendations, and the difficulty of CRA consultants to maintain independence and to be engaged early in the development process all raise questions regarding the overall utility of the existing arrangements.

The efficacy of the S79s guidelines

The S79c Guidelines are the basis for the preparation CRA reports in NSW. Given the concerns raised above regarding the quality of many of the CRAs reviewed in the first phase of our research, attention will now turn to the S79c Guidelines themselves.

Presentation of the guidelines

The NSW guidelines consist of five pages of text (1015 words). There are no images, drawings, photos or illustrations to communicate design concepts. The CPTED concepts contained within the guidelines are explained by written text only and they are difficult to interpret in purely written form. Particularly due to the specific

nomenclature used within criminology that often requires translation (Zahm 2005), the CPTED concepts lend themselves to being illustrated through diagrams, pictures, or photos, which are formats that will help bridge professional gaps between criminologists and built environment and design professionals, who will ordinarily have received little or no crime prevention training.

Many of these limitations have been addressed in guidelines subsequently developed in other Australian and international jurisdictions. For example, the *Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria*⁴ (Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment 2005) represent a particularly comprehensive approach to designing out crime. The 65 pages of the *Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria* include over 60 photos, 10 diagrams and two aerial images to illustrate specific design advice and provide 178 design suggestions grouped across 10 design elements, including: neighbourhood design, activity centres, building design, parks and open spaces, walking and cycle paths, public transport, car park areas, public facilities, lighting and signage.

The following are just some of the design suggestions:

Cul-de-sacs should be no longer than 75 metres from entry to end. They should also be straight to maximize visibility from adjoining streets. (2005, 16)

Recesses in ground floor walls should be less than 0.3 metres deep to ensure they cannot be used as places to hide or entrap. (2005, 26)

Where landscaping is provided in public open spaces, or in adjacent streets or parks, ensure trees or vegetation do not block the field of vision between 0.7 metres and 2.4 metres above ground level. (2005, 33)

Ensure that paths are a minimum of 1.2 metres wide to allow pedestrians to walk two abreast. (2005, 36)

While not all of the 178 design suggestions contained in the Victorian guidelines are this specific, they do speak to designers and planners in ways that the general information in the NSW guidelines does not. Interpretation of the CPTED concepts included in the NSW guidelines can be disputed. Surveillance, for example, could be interpreted as a broad design goal or a narrow technical issue associated with the installation of a window in a particular location. Given the breadth of the four CPTED principles employed in the NSW guidelines, it becomes difficult to know how they can be assessed objectively. In contrast, it would be somewhat easier to determine if a proposed development included a cul-de-sac longer than 75 metres or contained walkways less than 1.2 metres in width.

By using more visual cues and providing examples where CPTED has been incorporated into designs, this article presents that the Victorian design guidelines are more likely to resonate with and thus influence designers. The photos, diagrams, and images have greater potential to positively motivate designers and

planners, while also aiding local authorities determining whether proposed developments have sought to minimise any potential crime risks.

Only four CPTED concepts

The NSW guidelines focus on four key CPTED concepts (surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement, and space management). By focusing on only four concepts, the guidelines can be seen to restrict the consideration of other CPTED principles and issues that may have greater relevance to a particular development. The following is taken from Report 16, which was developed for a healthcare facility:

This report has been prepared to detail the crime minimisation design mechanisms proposed within the development and assess these mechanisms in accordance with the four (4) crime prevention through environmental design principles. (Report 16, 10)

With medications and expensive medical equipment likely to be held on the premises, there might have been greater value in considering how to secure the areas holding these items, rather than addressing generic CPTED considerations in the CRA report. Paying lip service to the CPTED principles in lieu of tackling specific situational factors was also illustrated in Report 3:

The [name] development will integrate the four principles of surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and space management into the design and operation of the [development] so that it will successfully contribute to, and improve the existing environment within which it is located. (Report 3, 9)

Upon completion, this development was described as being likely to house expensive cultural artefacts. While the four generic CPTED concepts certainly have relevance, there might, for example, be greater value in considering specific security procedures or design features to protect these works. Instead, this report stated that there would be a number of generic space management strategies adopted, including:

Activity coordination, site cleanliness, rapid repair of vandalism and graffiti, replacement of damaged pedestrian and car park lighting and removal or refurbishment of decayed physical elements. (Report 3, 8)

The S79c Guidelines do not demand analysis of specific crime risks linked to the function of the facility or development. Consequently, CRA reports are in compliance with the S79c Guidelines even if they use generic language that minimally addresses the four specified CPTED concepts.

It is thus argued that the guidelines represent an overly narrow reading of CPTED. The contemporary academic literature imagines the need to include more than just these four general concepts contained in the NSW guidelines. For example, Cozens, Saville,

and Hiller (2005) include consideration of target hardening and image as key elements of CPTED, while Saville and Cleveland (2008) introduce social cohesion, connectivity, community culture, and threshold capacity (known as second generation CPTED). Moreover, Schneider and Kitchen (2007) suggest that space syntax and new urbanism are also emerging concepts that have relevance in designing out crime. While these theorists and perspectives differ in the detail (not developed further here), there is general consensus that the four concepts used in the NSW guidelines do not capture key concepts relevant to designing safer neighbourhoods and communities. This suggests that there is room to broaden the key concepts covered by the guidelines to the consideration of issues wider than those covered by the four, first-generation CPTED principles.

Existing concepts are not relevant in all circumstances

Some of the CPTED concepts contained in the guidelines will have little or no relevance to particular developments. For example, Report 4 states that:

The principle of access control has been omitted entirely from the assessment ... owing to its lack of relevance to this development proposal. (Report 4, 6)

This is likely to be true for many developments involving some form of public space, but the S79c Guidelines still require its discussion. Furthermore, at the stage in the development application process when CRAs are generally conducted, there will often be little or no clear plan for future-oriented space management regimes. Maintenance and activity coordination (practices generally linked to space management) will frequently be the responsibility of contractors who will be engaged closer to or after the completion of the development.

The following excerpts highlight the lack of clear plans for the management of these issues at this stage of the development process:

The [company name] management will include active surveillance in the form of security patrols and CCTV surveillance. (Report 12, 6)

Aside from the passive surveillance provided through the design of the development, it is understood that [company name] will extend the security system [that] are currently in place. (Report 31, 10)

My instructions are that an appropriate maintenance/security patrol program is catered for that will impact on the replacement of failed lighting, prompt removal of any graffiti and the utilisation of graffiti inhibiting surface coatings are to be used on the extremities of the development. (Report 11, 10)

A planning consent authority would have difficulty assessing these somewhat generic commitments and developers will be likely to resist establishing concrete plans for these issues before they have been granted approval for the proposed development. Consequently, of the four CPTED principles covered in the NSW guidelines, it is possible that only half (i.e. surveillance and territorial reinforcement) would be relevant to all developments.

Planning consent

The penultimate theme to be considered here are the issues associated with planning consent and the assessment of crime risks for proposed developments. The current NSW guidelines make it difficult for local authorities to review the CRA reports adequately. As stated previously, the guidelines can be used to justify modification of the development to minimise the risk of crime or refusal of the development on the grounds that crime risk cannot be appropriately minimised (DUAP 2001, 2).

It is very difficult to see how the guidelines in their current form could be used to reject a development application. By using the CPTED vernacular, it is possible to connect almost any development proposal with the general CPTED principles. For example, Report 28 states under the heading – Territorial Reinforcement:

The overall design of this project links public and private spaces. The use of the bistro terrace and central courtyard are visually clear and only low stone walls define their boundaries. They are visually clear from public spaces and would attract anyone in distress. The fact that these active areas and building generally overlook public parkland will make it safer and encourage more evening use. (Report 28, 3)

It is very difficult to see how a local authority could interpret and assess such a sweeping statement without further information justifying these claims. The use of the CPTED vernacular gives commentary like this the veneer of credibility and rationality, regardless of whether the analysis has a basis in relevant empirical evidence, or strict analysis of the architectural plans for the relevant proposed development (which were entirely absent in this report).

The local government (LG) interviewees echoed similar concerns. Many suggested that crime risks were generally considered a low priority in reviewing development applications:

I certainly wouldn't say [crime is] the priority. I would say it's a consideration and I wouldn't give it probably more emphasis other than saying that it's probably something that I would deal with halfway through the application. (LG Interviewee #01)

Sometimes the crime prevention design guidelines are, I wouldn't say ignored but they're given less

determinative weight than other things that we're considering at the time. (LG Interviewee #05)

To be perfectly honest, the extent of importance of crime prevention would probably be in the mid- to low-range with our applications. (LG Interviewee #06) Planning issues involve everything from parking to streetscape to bulk and scale, floor space ratio, height, noise, amenity, privacy. There's a huge number of issues that we have to consider. (LG Interviewee #08)

These responses place CPTED and concern for crime risks within the context of wider planning issues and the myriad of other considerations that need to be balanced in reviewing a development application. Indeed, recent calls have been made to balance the needs of overtly prescriptive design guidelines such as these, and the need for planning to engage the complexity of each specific context (Kent and Wheeler 2015). As such, despite the existence of the Guidelines, these responses echo previous findings and suggest that crime is generally given a low priority when compared to the other planning considerations and that this may be seen as desirable depending on the context (Fisher and Piracha 2012; van Stigt, Driessen, and Spit 2015).

Police involvement

All LG planning personnel who were interviewed identified some form of liaison with the NSW Police Force in periodically reviewing development applications. When asked to describe police contributions, respondents suggested that police provide comments and raise any particular concerns about potential crime risks of proposed developments.

There were mixed views regarding the efficacy of police involvement. Some interviewees highlighted the merits of this process and their satisfaction with the relationships and referral processes with police:

So that system works well and we welcome comments from the police, especially with people that we don't know about or developments that we're not cognisant of issues. So they do have hands on experience in a specific area about the implications of a development which we welcome. (LG Interviewee #08)

It seems to work here with the way that we've arranged the referral process with the police. (LG Interviewee #10)

Others were less positive. One issue that arose was compliance with statutory timeframes, which consent authorities have come under increasing pressure in recent years to meet (NSW Department of Planning 2007; Ruming 2011). Three interviewees cited the time taken by police to provide their comments as a problem (two are outlined below):

It is a little bit tricky because there is only one person and with the yield of development applications we have, quite often we're chasing the police to get the comment. Comments are great. Getting them out of

the police is sometimes a little frustrating ... We've had a situation where we'll be waiting four to maybe even five months to get a response because [name of officer] or the crime prevention officer will be on annual leave and there is no one that can do the job. (LG Interviewee #01)

Timeframe, we give them a 21-day period, because an external referral. Generally they don't get back to us in that 21-day period. (LG Interviewee #06)

Beyond the timeliness of responses, there was also some discussion of the usefulness of the responses provided by police. Some interviewees suggested that the comments provided by police were often too generic, with little information about the specific proposed development or the submitted architectural plans. Others highlighted that some comments coming from the police are outside of the council's remit or planning guidelines:

In terms of their usefulness, I suppose it's a flaw of any specialised field, that they are very narrowly based on crime prevention principles and elevate that to the highest level in their minds for their referral, which is the same with every referral that we receive, but it means that their comments are taken with a grain of salt and when they're competing with other interests they're often of a lesser priority than others. (LG Interviewee #05)

I think that some officers, on some occasions, have commented on things beyond the scope of their role if you like ... We can't actually take into account the criminal history of someone, the application, the people that are patrons there or anything. So I think that's because the police are not town planners, they sometimes ask us to impose a condition, or ask us to limit something that's actually beyond that scope if that makes sense. (LG Interviewee #07)

One interviewee suggested that some of these problems might be due to a lack of guidance.

So I think that there's probably a lack of guidance about what they should be commenting on, so that probably doesn't help them in trying to come to grips with it. (LG Interviewee #07)

Taken together, these responses suggest that councils do involve police in reviewing generally small numbers of development applications that are considered to pose crime risks due to the nature or management of the proposed development (or redevelopment). The nature of the relationships and practices vary, with some interviewees providing glowing comments, while others expressed concerns about the timeliness and usefulness of the information provided by police. While these findings shed some light on police/council liaison, similar research would ideally be conducted with police Crime Prevention Officers to test the findings arising from interviews with council planning staff.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings reported here do not provide an exhaustive list of issues arising from the research in recent years on the use of CPTED in NSW. Within this research, themes emerge suggesting that there has been growing engagement with CPTED in NSW in the last 10–15 years. However, there have also been numerous implementation challenges that undermine the utility of approaches to CPTED. The language used and lack of specific guidance within the S79c Guidelines render it difficult for consent authorities to hold applicants to account for potential crime risks. Consequently, the nature of the CRA reports developed in NSW vary in quality. Few of the reviewed reports reflect the qualities of a ‘good report’ as described by consultants engaged in drafting these reports. Moreover, the stated intention for local councils to engage police in reviewing crime risks of particular developments has been stymied in some instances by operational policing responsibilities. Leave entitlements and the competing duties faced by Crime Prevention Officers hinder their ability to provide timely reviews of development applications. Additionally, some local council interviewees described comments provided by the police as generic and/or straying beyond the provisions of the relevant legislation.

The following recommendations address these current weaknesses of the NSW system.

There is a need to develop new CPTED guidelines. The NSW S79c Guidelines were introduced in 2001. Many jurisdictions have subsequently introduced more comprehensive guidelines (including Western Australia, Queensland, and Victoria). Adopting some of the techniques evident in these more recent guidelines would be beneficial, especially the use of images to convey key messages and more detailed design guidance.

Any new guidelines should consider the threshold requirements for CRAs to be conducted. We argue that the existing threshold of 20 or more residential dwellings as a potential trigger for a CRA is too low. The focus should be on ensuring that major developments are thoroughly analysed, while smaller developments receive more modest attention. The lack of recognition in the S79c Guidelines that developments differing in size, purpose, or location present greater or lesser crime risks is problematic. New guidelines should apply some form of scale so that high risk and/or major developments receive the greatest attention.

Ideally, any new guidelines would also be augmented by the development of a standard Development Control Plan (DCP) at the local level or a State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) at the state level on CPTED. Despite holding less legislative weight than the s79c guidelines, some NSW councils have developed and adopted specific CPTED DCPs (notable examples include: Rockdale in 2002, Canterbury in

2003, Penrith in 2003, Auburn in 2006, and Kempsey in 2008). The CRA consultants suggested that CPTED DCPs provide greater certainty and clarity regarding what is expected of a development application with respect to identifying and mitigating crime risks. However, the inconsistencies across council boundaries were repeatedly aired as frustrations throughout both sets of interviews that were conducted, perhaps necessitating a more uniform SEPP at the state level. A standard CPTED DCP available to be adopted by all councils would increase efficiency for both councils and developers. It would save considerable time and resources in individual councils developing their plans and would provide both consistency and clarity regarding what is expected of developers.

Reinvigoration of professional development arrangements should accompany any new guidelines of DCPs or SEPP’s, and additional training for police, consultants, council planners, and built environment professionals would improve CPTED practice in NSW. The first pertains to the training of Crime Prevention Officers in the NSW Police Force. While the Safer by Design course is available, there was some suggestion by council planners that even more guidance and training are required to ensure that crime prevention officers understand the NSW planning system and what they can include in the reviews of development applications.

Consultants responsible for preparing CRA reports suggested that there should be professional development opportunities beyond the Safer by Design course. Upon completion of that course, currently, there are few opportunities for ongoing development. Council planners would also benefit from ongoing professional development opportunities. Given that those who were interviewed generally suggested a waning interest in the Safer by Design course, they may be interested in other, ongoing development opportunities.

For built environment professionals, it has long been recommended that CPTED principles and content be integrated into tertiary courses. Interviewees (both council and private consultants) generally suggested that there had not been a noticeable increase in CPTED training in various built environment courses. While these views do not conclusively suggest that improvements have not been made, this issue might be usefully pursued.

Finally, to date, there has been limited analysis of the effectiveness of CPTED in Australia. Research from elsewhere demonstrates some benefits in particular contexts (Armitage 2013; Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 2013; Paulsen 2013). The absence of locally generated data leaves considerable gaps in Australia’s extant evidence base and thus questions about what policy and practice configurations might generate the best outcomes cannot be answered with confidence.

Without this evidence, it is partially an article of faith that adopting CPTED guidelines and policies necessarily is beneficial. Analysing the effectiveness of CPTED will be one way of helping to guide future work in this area.

Despite these recommendations, there is a strong likelihood that CPTED in NSW will be further relegated in priority within the reformed planning system (Sutton, Cherney, and White 2008). With changes afoot to the overall NSW planning system (Moore and Dyer 2012; Hazzard 2013; Rummig and Davies 2014), there is some uncertainty surrounding the role that CPTED will assume in NSW in the future. Given that the justification for these reforms is partially predicated on cutting 'red-tape' and streamlining the planning system (Hazzard 2013), it is likely that the minimal existing CPTED requirements may be further reduced.

This is potentially compounded by the significant declines in property crime in NSW in the last 13 years (Clancey and Lulham 2014). Between 2001 and 2010, the 'rate of household burglary recorded by NSW Police fell by half, and the current rate of household burglary is considerably lower than it was 20 years ago' (Fitzgerald and Poynton 2011, 1) and even greater reductions have been seen for other offence categories, such as motor vehicle theft and robbery. The political pressures of dealing with rising crime in the late 1990s are not as evident today. As Sutton, Cherney, and White (2008) previously observed, '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' (2008, 68). Thus, falling crime rates, the focus on 'cutting red tape' through the proposed planning reforms and the moderate success of the S79c Guidelines in stimulating some focus on CPTED might well conspire to see little new work in this area. If, however, there is the will to improve CPTED practice in NSW, then the research findings and recommendations presented here might well provide some useful guidance.

Notes

1. A full description of this sampling procedure and a discussion of its limitations can be found in Clancey, Fisher, and Lee (2011).
2. A full description of the research methods adopted in this study and a discussion of its limitations (including the sampling techniques to ensure equal representation of inner and outer Sydney councils) can be found in Clancey, Fisher, and Rutherford (2014).
3. The full method for this project and a discussion of its relevant limitations can be viewed in Clancey, Fisher, and Lee (2015).
4. The Victorian Guidelines (at the time of writing) are available at <http://www.healthyplaces.org.au/userfiles/file/Safer%20Design%20Victoria.pdf>.

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