

# *Do Crime Risk Assessment Reports Measure Crime Risks?†*

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## *Abstract*

Since 2001, crime risk assessment reports have been required for various proposed developments in New South Wales (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) 2001). However, there has been very little analysis of these reports, including close consideration of the utility of the findings contained in such reports. To begin to address this knowledge gap, crime risk assessment reports relating to developments across New South Wales<sup>1</sup> have been analysed. It was found that: virtually identical reports were submitted by one company for different developments; less than half of the reports in the sample included crime data relevant to the area of the proposed development; less than half explicitly involved consultation with relevant stakeholders (police and local government); and a little more than one-in-five reports contained any adverse findings or commentary on the proposed development. These findings raise questions about the value of crime risk assessment reports under the current regimen.

## **Introduction**

The last few decades have witnessed a significant shift in how crime is controlled and managed. Zedner (2007) argues that a collection of practices, systems and techniques focusing on ‘pre-crime’ have and increasingly operate alongside the formal criminal justice system. This ‘preventive turn’ (Hughes 2007) incorporates a panoply of developments, including: the rise of private security (Loader and Walker 2006; Zedner 2009); the strengthening of surveillance assemblages (Ericson 2007; Lyon 2007); the emergence of risk analysis and management (O’Malley 2010); and diverse crime prevention practices. A component of what (Garland 2001) has termed the ‘criminologies of everyday life’, these disparate practices, systems, techniques and programs now occupy a significant place in state and private responses to crime.

One significant strand of this ‘preventive turn’ focuses on reducing the opportunities for crime. Felson and Cohen (1980) suggest that increases in crime experienced through the 1960s and 1970s were the result of a reduction of ‘capable guardians’. Increasing numbers of dual-income families resulted in homes being vacated for long periods of the day;

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increased car ownership provided greater opportunities for motor vehicle theft; reduced supervision of children and young people after school enhanced opportunities for youth crime; and the growth of portable consumer goods increased the volume of CRAVED<sup>2</sup> (Clarke 1999) products in circulation. Thus, situational factors increased opportunities for crime and these opportunities were exploited by 'rational offenders' (Cornish and Clarke 1986). By reducing the rewards, increasing the effort, increasing the risks, removing the excuses and reducing provocations associated with offending (Cornish and Clarke 2003), it is argued that crime can be successfully prevented.

Consistent with the opportunity-reducing techniques of situational crime prevention is a movement 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). This can be achieved through various means, including: restricting access to buildings; activating spaces to enhance the natural surveillance of an area; fixing and repairing damage to buildings to demonstrate capable guardianship; increasing ownership over areas so that proprietorial behaviour discourages unlawful behaviour; installing electronic forms of surveillance or engaging security personnel to monitor specific sites; and ensuring landscaping does not obscure sightlines, so that people feel safe to use public spaces.

CPTED has gained increasing traction over the last few decades (Cozens, Saville and Hillier 2005; Minnery and Lim 2005; Atlas 2008). Many police and local authority staff now receive CPTED training (Kelpczarek 2003; McCauley and Opie no date; McDonald and Kitteringham 2004; Cozens, Thorn and Hillier 2008; Book and Schneider 2010); rating systems for some forms of built environment operate in some jurisdictions to quantify safety and security (for example, the Secured by Design accreditation process in the United Kingdom); CPTED practitioner professional associations have emerged (for example, the International CPTED Association); and planning regimes incorporate CPTED design principles (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004; Scottish Executive Planning Department 2006; New Zealand Ministry of Justice 2005; Australian Capital Territory Government 2000; Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment 2005; South Australian Department of Transport and Urban Planning 2004; Western Australian Planning Commission 2006; Queensland Government 2007). In many jurisdictions, the most obvious embodiment of CPTED is through the creation and ratification of specific design guidelines that influence the way that the built environment is developed.

## The NSW Guidelines

The development of land in New South Wales (NSW) is essentially governed by the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)*. This Act has numerous objectives, including the 'promotion and co-ordination of the orderly and economic use and development of land' (s 5(a)(ii)). To achieve this, the Act classifies development in three ways:

1. Development that does not need consent;
2. Development that needs consent;
3. Development that is prohibited (Gurran 2007:242).

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<sup>2</sup> Concealable, Removable, Available, Valuable, Enjoyable, Disposable (Clarke 1999).

For those developments needing consent, various planning controls must be met. The planning controls needing to be satisfied will vary depending upon the nature and location of the development. In general terms, conditions of the *Act* will need to be addressed, as will relevant requirements of State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs), Regional Environmental Policies (REPs), Local Environmental Policies (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs). Together, these planning controls will set restrictions on the nature, size, type, function, and environmental impact of the proposed development.

One consideration within this plethora of planning controls is assessment of crime risks. In April 2001, the then Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP), introduced *Crime prevention and the assessment of development applications: Guidelines under section 79c of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* ('the Guidelines', five pages of text). These Guidelines were intended to 'help councils [ie local government authorities] identify crime risk and minimise 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 minimise the risk of crime; or
- refusal of the development on the grounds that crime risk cannot be appropriately minimised (DUAP 2001:2).

The Guidelines contain two parts: Part A describes a crime risk assessment (1 page); 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. Key provisions of these two Parts are reproduced here because the analysis of crime risk assessment reports covered in this article require an understanding of the key features of these Guidelines.

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).

The Guidelines then state that there are two key steps when assessing crime risk:

- obtain an understanding of the crime risk of the area, and if required
- apply (CPTED) treatments that correspond with levels of risk present in the area (DUAP 2001:3).

It is then stated that:

These guidelines outline how councils are to assess crime risk in local developments. They are not sufficient in themselves, however, to inform councils how to conduct crime risk assessments. To gain a detailed understanding of how to conduct crime risk assessments and how to apply CPTED, *council planners need to attend approved training courses* (emphasis in original) (DUAP 2001:3).

Formal crime risk assessments will be required for any development posing crime risks (in the council's opinion) and would include 'a new/refurbished shopping centre or transport

interchange, a large scale residential development (more than 20 dwellings), or the development/re-development of a mall or other public place, including the installation of new street furniture' (DUAP 2001:2). The Guidelines encourage councils and police to develop a local consultation protocol stipulating which developments would require a formal crime risk assessment, and state that 'typically, crime risk assessments are conducted in cooperation with trained local police' (DUAP 2001:2).

Beyond this guidance, the Guidelines also suggest that 'when conducting individual crime risk assessments, the consequences and likelihood of crime are identified and measured using recorded crime statistics, hotspot analyses and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) socio-economic data' (DUAP 2001:3). This is, in effect, the total direction provided in relation to crime risk assessments.

Part B of the Guidelines essentially provides definitions and examples of the four CPTED principles that should 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.

Surveillance 'means that people can see what others are doing. People feel safe in public areas when they can easily see and interact with others. Would be offenders are often deterred from committing crime in areas with high levels of surveillance' (DUAP 2001:4). Surveillance can be enhanced, the Guidelines suggest, by providing clear sightlines, effective lighting and landscaping that reduces spots where offenders can hide or entrap victims (DUAP 2001:4).

Access control involves the use of physical or symbolic barriers to attract, channel or restrict the movement of people. 'By making it clear where people are permitted to go or not to go, it becomes difficult for potential offenders to reach and victimise people and their property' (DUAP 2001:5). Access control can be achieved by:

landscapes and physical locations that channel and group pedestrians into target areas; public spaces which attract, rather than discourage people from gathering; and restricted access to internal areas or high-risk areas (like carparks or other rarely visited areas). This is often achieved through physical barriers (DUAP 2001:5).

Territorial reinforcement denotes ownership. The Guidelines suggest that 'people often feel comfortable in, and are more likely to visit, places which feel owned and cared for' and that if people 'feel that they have some ownership of public space, they are more likely to gather and enjoy that space' (DUAP 2005:5). This can be achieved by:

design that encourages people to gather in public space and to feel some responsibility for its use and condition; design with clear transitions and boundaries between public and private space and clear design cues on who is to use space and what it is to be used for (DUAP 2001:5).

Finally, space management pertains to attractive, well maintained and well-used spaces. 'Space management strategies include activity coordination, site cleanliness, rapid repair of vandalism and graffiti, the replacement of burned out pedestrian and car park lighting and the removal or refurbishment of decayed physical elements' (DUAP 2001:5).

This lengthy description of the NSW Guidelines for crime prevention and the assessment of development applications provides important context for the analysis of crime risk assessment reports prepared for developments in NSW in recent years.

## **Research methodology**

### ***Data and collection***

As outlined above, crime risk assessments are required for new/refurbished shopping centres or transport interchanges, large-scale residential developments (more than 20 new dwellings), or the development or re-development of a mall or other public place (DUAP 2001:2). Following the designation of a development as a 'major project' under section 3A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW), all public reports that have been submitted are published in the NSW Department of Planning's active tracking system and are put on public display at <<http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au>>.

Drawing on reports that had been lodged to the aforementioned website between 1 January 2007 and 31 October 2010, a purposive criterion sampling technique was used (Neuman 2006). From the total overall available sample of major projects, each project with an available crime risk assessment report was collected. These assessment reports were identified in and selected from the available attachments and resources attached to a project that made specific reference to 'crime risk' or 'CPTED' in the title of the report, or as the title of the relevant appendix. Thus, specific criteria were searched for while making judgments about the capacity of a project to be subjected to this analysis. A total of 33 crime risk assessments reports were identified, and selected from this dataset. As is indicated in Table 1, this method of collection resulted in a good mix of author and development type.

It has been decided to maintain the anonymity of the authors of these reports and to de-identify the development to which they refer. Despite the fact that the reports were publicly available at the time of collecting the data (and most likely still are publicly available), there is no advantage to the aims of this project in identifying these firms and developments. Rather, each report has been numbered and generic categories have been created and used to describe the nature of the individual or company responsible for preparing the reports and the type of development to which it refers (see Table 1). While the categories used to distinguish the nature of the individuals or companies preparing the crime risk assessment reports are largely self-explanatory, it was decided that planning companies would be split into general planning companies and social planning companies. The latter generally included social planning, review and community consultation as company activities, whereas general planning companies tended to just deal with aiding development companies to navigate planning controls.

**Table 1: Crime Risk Assessment Reports — report author, development type and report length**

<b>Report Number</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Type of Development</b>	<b>Report Length (pages)</b>
1	Social Planning Firm	Commercial Mixed Use	16
2	Social Planning Firm	Health Care Facility	35
3	Engineering Firm	Art and Cultural Facility	11
4	Engineering Firm	Public Thoroughfare	8
5	Property Development Company	Residential	4
6	Social Planning Firm	Residential	7
7	Social Planning Firm	Residential	35
8	Social Planning Firm	Residential	13
9	Property Development Company	Residential	4
10	Property Development Company	Residential	4
11	Crime Prevention Consultant	Residential	12
12	Property Development Company	Commercial	7
13	Property Development Company	Residential	4
14	Social Planning Firm	Commercial	24
15	Social Planning Firm	Residential	4
16	Planning Firm	Health Care Facility	10
17	Property Development Company	Residential Mixed Use	17
18	Crime Prevention Consultant	Residential Mixed Use	19
19	Planning Firm	Residential Mixed Use	12

Report Number	Author	Type of Development	Report Length (pages)
20	Crime Prevention Consultant	Residential Mixed Use	24
21	Architectural Firm	Health Care Facility	7
22	Architectural Firm	Residential	2
23	Property Development Company	Residential Mixed Use	3
24	Social Planning Firm	Commercial Mixed Use	16
25	Architectural Firm	Health Care Facility	3
26	Architectural Firm	Residential	4
27	Architectural Firm	Licensed Venue	14
28	Architectural Firm	Licensed Venue, Mixed Use Residential	3
29	Crime Prevention Consultant	Residential	13
30	Crime Prevention Consultant	Commercial Mixed Use	15
31	Architectural Firm	Health Care Facility	11
32	Architectural Firm	Residential	14
33	Architectural Firm	Residential	4

### *Analysis*

It has been persuasively argued that documents 'ought to be regarded as akin to ... the sociologists interviewee' (Glaser and Strauss 1967:163). The content of the 33 documents provides the data for the analysis in this article (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Hodder 2000). This research sought to identify and categorise the source and volume of the content that constitutes crime risk assessment reports and to critically analyse the commentary and recommendations in the reports. To achieve this end, a content analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Neuman 2006) was conducted. Shapiro and Markoff (1997:14) broadly define content analysis as any 'methodological measurement applied to text (or other symbolic materials) for social science purposes'. The benefit of this method of analysis for the data here is that:

at one level, the manifest content of the text can be captured and revealed in a number of text statistics. At a second level, the researcher is interested in the latent content and deeper meaning embodied in the text, which may require more interpretation (Duriiau, Reger and Pfarrer 2007:6).

As Prior (2008:824) has suggested, 'documents serve not merely as containers of content, but as active agents in episodes of interaction and schemes of social organization'. The analysis undertaken in this article proceeds on both of these levels. As a result of this analysis, the crime risk assessment reports constituted both qualitative and quantitative data and could be subjected to both deductive and inductive interpretation (Roberts 1989).

### ***Content***

Each crime risk assessment was systematically coded to identify the following material: the presence of crime data; the use of demographic data; reference to the architectural plans; the number and variety of site visits conducted; consultation with stakeholders; reference to academic CPTED literature; the presence of recommendations; and the presence of positive and negative design critiques. Data analysts were given specific criteria for identifying the aforementioned characteristics of each crime risk assessment, and 16 of the 33 documents were also cross-checked to further ensure reliability of the analysis process.

### ***Research limitations***

In reviewing and analysing the crime risk assessment reports, particular limitations emerged. The diverse nature of the developments and the point in the development process at which a crime risk assessment report is prepared differ, making comparison difficult. Some crime risk assessment reports were stand-alone reports, while others were embedded as part of a much larger report. Some of the reports were written for modification of existing facilities, while others were for entirely new developments. The ability to assess crime risks for premises that will retain their existing use through modification or upgrade is likely to be different to sites where former buildings have been demolished and totally new facilities, with new functions, are to be developed.

Furthermore, it was not possible to determine the time available to prepare a report, the associated fees, or the pressures placed on the authors of the crime risk assessment reports. A host of workplace and project-based pressures will invariably impact upon the amount of time that can be dedicated to a task like preparing a crime risk assessment report, all of which add to the diversity of the sample.

### **Research findings**

Analysis of the 33 crime risk assessment reports drafted between 1 January 2007 and 31 October 2010 revealed the following (note that percentages have been rounded for ease of presentation):

- 24 separate companies compiled the 33 reports. Five companies authored more than one report in the sample;
- the length of the reports (not including appendices) ranged from 2 to 35 pages. The mean number of pages was 11.5 and the median was 11 pages. The standard deviation was 8.5 pages;
- all reports included generic CPTED information (discussed in detail below);



- some form of crime data was presented for 16 of the 33 reports (49%);
- 11 of the 33 reports (33%) made reference to a site visit (or visits) during the preparation of the report;
- 13 of the 33 reports (39%) made reference to stakeholders being consulted during the preparation of the crime risk assessment report;
- 11 of the 33 reports (33%) made reference to demographic data for the area of the proposed development in the report;
- 23 of the 33 reports (70%) made explicit reference to architectural plans of the proposed development;
- 17 of the 33 reports (52%) included recommendations about how crime risks could be mitigated or managed; and
- 7 of the 33 reports (21%) contained adverse findings.

In summary, the crime risk assessment reports reviewed were, on average, 11 pages in length, contained generic information about CPTED and generally included references to architectural plans. About half included some crime data, a little over one-in-three made reference to consultations with key stakeholders and one-in-three made reference to demographic data relevant to the area of the proposed development. Although half of the reports contained recommendations about how the development might address potential crime risks, approximately only one-in-five reports made adverse findings.

### *Authorship*

The crime risk assessment reports were prepared by various companies (or sole traders). Twenty-four separate companies compiled the 33 reports. Of the five companies that prepared more than one report, three authored two reports, one company prepared four reports, and another produced five reports.

The companies responsible for these reports varied in size and background, ranging from sole traders to major property development companies. Three of the consultancy companies engaged in crafting these reports (accounting for five of the reports) specialised in crime prevention, while all other authors had backgrounds in social planning (six reports), architecture (nine reports), engineering (two reports), or property development (11 reports).

While the bulk of the reports were drafted by external consultants, five reports were prepared by the property development company who was responsible for the overall development. While it is difficult to gauge the potential impact of this situation, it does raise numerous questions of perceived bias. If the report is drafted by the same organisation responsible for the overall development, is the author of the report afforded greater access to design and architectural teams? Conversely, is there greater pressure to document positive aspects of the development in such a situation? What of the perceived conflict of interest? Further research into the impact of being an external or internal consultant on this process would be beneficial.

Analysis of the reports also revealed how particular companies adopted internally consistent approaches to the report preparation across the different developments. This meant that their reports followed standard formats including use of specific headings. In the case of one company, each of the four reports that they prepared were identical, save for the reference to the location of the proposed development (as is evidenced in Tables 2 and 3 below).

While each of these reports were drafted for residential developments, therefore making it vaguely possible that the same design was used in each case, it does raise questions about the utility of the crime risk assessment reports if they become generic. The four proposed residential developments did differ in size, but given that there was no detailed reference to the architectural plans in the crime risk assessment reports, it is difficult to determine how valid the practice is of submitting a near-standard report as part of the development application. This too warrants further research.

**Table 2: Excerpt from Report 10, page 2**

Principle	Assessment
<b>Surveillance</b>	
<i>Clear sightlines between public and private places</i>	The private spaces of the proposed development, particularly the apartments, have clear sightlines with the streets and the public open space. Balconies are specifically oriented to the communal open space areas between buildings 4 and 5 which will enhance the casual surveillance. In addition, balconies are also oriented towards the adjoining street again increasing surveillance as it will be possible to observe vehicles and pedestrians approaching the building. These measures will promote surveillance and minimise crime risk.

**Table 3: Excerpt from Report 13, page 2**

Principle	Assessment
<b>Surveillance</b>	
<i>Clear sightlines between public and private places</i>	The private spaces of the proposed development, particularly the apartments, have clear sightlines with the street and the communal open space areas in the site. Balconies and courtyards face the street as well as windows from habitable rooms. This will promote casual surveillance and minimise crime risk. Due to the positioning of balconies, there will be particularly close casual surveillance of the public spaces around the site.

### ***Report content***

Given that the NSW Guidelines are largely silent on how crime risk assessments should be carried out and what should be contained in the ensuing reports, it is difficult to know how the findings of this research relate to what was intended by those responsible for the preparation of the Guidelines. Some key features of the crime risk assessment reports will be discussed here in detail.

### **Length of crime risk assessment reports**

The length of the reports (not including appendices) ranged from 2 to 35 pages. The mean number of pages was 11.5, the median was 11 pages and the standard deviation was 8.5 pages. However, the actual calculation of report length is not clear-cut. Appendices were excluded, generally because the appendices of some reports largely included crime data tables that often had somewhat spurious relation to the proposed development (to be discussed in more detail). In the case of one report, an entire crime map report from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) was appended to the crime risk assessment report. The crime map report was 70 pages in length.

Many reports contained pages with little content. Title pages, content pages, cover letters and other similar devices were common. Reports from one company, who was responsible for four reports (which were almost identical), were four pages in length (plus a cover page). The cover page included the title, the site address and the date. The first page provided an introduction of four sentences. The second and third pages contained the Assessment, which consisted listing observations against the four CPTED principles. The fourth page consisted of four sentences. Thus, quantifying the length of these reports was not as straightforward as it might seem.

### **Generic CPTED information**

All reports contained generic CPTED information. In the main, this included defining and explaining key CPTED principles and was generally limited to the four CPTED principles covered by the NSW Guidelines (ie surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and space management). In some instances, a significant proportion of the reports were dedicated to the explanation of these concepts.

One company responsible for preparing two reports (Reports 18 and 30) appended approximately four pages of information on CPTED. These pages contain information about the history of CPTED and explanation of key CPTED principles. To demonstrate the breadth of the terrain covered, the following are some 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 of the same information (although such a discursive historical review of CPTED was rare). Many reports paraphrase or reproduce information contained in the NSW Guidelines. While it could be argued that it is beneficial to have some

agreed understanding of CPTED and the relevant terms and concepts, the provision of lengthy, standard descriptions of CPTED could also serve to pad out reports or unnecessarily extend the length of these reports.

### **Crime and demographic data**

The NSW Guidelines state:

when conducting individual crime risk assessments, the consequences and likelihood of crime are identified and measured using recorded crime statistics, hotspot analyses and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) socio-economic data (DUAP 2001:3).

Given that some form of crime data was presented for only 16 of the 33 reports (49%) and only 11 of the 33 reports (33%) made reference to demographic data for the area of the proposed development in the report, it would seem that the spirit and intent of this section of the NSW Guidelines have not been fully realised in the sample of crime risk assessment reports.

The crime and demographic data that was presented varied across the reports. Some reports included crime maps copied from BOCSAR crime map reports or hotspot maps. Others included crime data tables for the relevant local government area (LGA), also downloaded from the BOCSAR website. Some reports provided detailed information regarding age profiles, income, educational levels and other socio-demographic information about the LGA in which the development was positioned.

While data was provided in close to half of the reports, there is some question about the utility of the data provided. Clancey (2011) has noted the problems associated with crime data being reported at the LGA level for proposed developments that constitute a comparably small parcel of land. This has been highlighted in one of the reports:

For the purposes of this report, this crime data relates to the entire [name removed] LGA and does NOT specifically relate to the [name removed] precinct. Specific location data is at this stage unavailable (Report 11:5).

Moreover, questions are raised about the utility of crime data being reported that bear no functional relationship to the development. There are certain crimes that might be considered relevant to a residential development — domestic violence; break, enter and steal; steal motor vehicle; steal from motor vehicle; and malicious damage to property are probably the most voluminous offences related to residential developments. Not all of these offences are necessarily amenable to being ‘designed out’ or to physical prevention techniques. Thus, it is argued that only the offences that directly relate to the functionality of the proposed development and that can be remedied through physical design *should* be included in a crime risk assessment report. Of those reports where crime data was presented, many included multiple crime categories, which have little or no relationship with the proposed development.

For example, one report (Report 18) includes trend data across 17 crime categories for the LGA. These crime categories cover (amongst others) murder, assault (domestic violence related), break and enter (dwelling), steal from retail store, steal from dwelling and arson (Report 18:21). The proposed development is a commercial and student accommodation mixed use site. The relevance of LGA-wide statistics on assault (domestic violence related)

and steal from retail for store, for example, is questionable. A point not lost on the authors of the report:

... determining risks associated with crime in and around major urban sites is equally subjective in the way those risks are identified, quantified, assessed and managed. Subjectivity comes from different versions and/or perceptions of behaviours which may or may not become criminal incidents (Report 18:12).

Another report (Report 6, Appendix A) includes the number of incidents and the rates for 60 separate offences across a five-year period for the LGA in which the proposed development sits. Given that the proposed development includes commercial and residential units, it seems noteworthy that data would be provided on justice procedures (escape custody, fail to appear, breach of bail) and stock (livestock) theft (amongst other offences). The inclusion of data on these offences seems unnecessary.

### **Stakeholder consultation**

The NSW Guidelines are generally silent on stakeholder consultation. However, they do make mention of the NSW Police Service *Safer by Design Evaluation*, an instrument, it is stated, based on the Australian Risk Management Standard 4360:1999. The Guidelines suggest that 'use of this instrument and the *Companion to the Safer by Design Evaluation* will help assessors to identify crime risk in proposed developments and in existing environments' (DUAP 2001:3). Given the reference to this Standard (which has now been superseded by AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009, Risk Management: Principles and guidelines), it could be argued that there is an implicit assumption that relevant stakeholders will be consulted. The Australian Risk Management Standard integrates stakeholder consultation as a means of understanding risks and threats to a particular facility or organisation.

Only 13 of the 33 reports (39%) made reference to stakeholders being consulted during the preparation of the crime risk assessment report. Where stakeholders were consulted, police were the most frequently cited stakeholders (12 of the 13 reports). Four referred to consultations with personnel from the relevant local council. Two reports specifically mentioned consultations with architects for the project or the general manager of the venue. Consultations with planners, developers and neighbouring residents were only mentioned in one report each.

How this information was used to assess crime risks for a proposed development varied across authors and reports. One company, which produced five reports (Reports 1, 2, 7, 14 and 24), included a specific section in each report outlining key comments from people consulted. For example, in one report (Report 1), findings from consultation included:

Overall, he [Crime Prevention Officer, NSW Police Force] considered that the design was appropriate and that there appeared to be no immediate concern regarding safety and potential crime resulting from the proposed strategies (Report1:13).

Another report also reports consultations with local police:

Consultations with the NSW Police indicated that the area in the vicinity of the [proposed development], including the surrounding residential areas, are not identified as problem areas or "hot spots". In summary, there is very little policing activity required for the area (Report 27:6).

Report 11 also refers to consultations with police:

In a meeting with Senior Sgt [name removed] (Crime Statistics and Intelligence officer, Crime Management Unit, [name removed] Local Area Command, NSW Police Force) he stated “the types of crimes occurring around this proposed development site primarily relate to underage drinking, antisocial behavior, malicious damage, graffiti & stealing offences. The offences mainly occur along [name removed] Rd, the [name removed] caravan park and in the public parks and mostly occur after dark and on weekends and school holidays. A lot of problems come from the secondary supply of alcohol to minors purchased from the [name removed] Hotel” (Report 11:7).

In these cases, consultations with police are used to support the development. Whether these sentiments accurately reflect the views of the police interviewed/consulted remains untested.

It is difficult to infer exactly when crime risk assessment reports are drafted in the overall development process. With so few reports referring to discussions or consultations with architects (2 out of 33), it is difficult to know how much dialogue was created between the authors of the crime risk assessment reports and the people responsible for designing the development. Ideally, it would be preferable if the crime risk consultants were engaged early in the development process. This would allow for an iterative process to ensure that designs are modified to limit crime risks before they are settled. This is potentially the most cost-effective time for modifications to be made and avoids the situation where a crime risk assessment report is retrospectively written highlighting the benefits of the development. In such cases, a crime risk assessment report might demonstrate how changes have been made throughout the design process reflecting CPTED principles.

Without clear guidance on the nature and type of stakeholder consultation that would be considered acceptable, it is difficult to know whether consultations with stakeholders are required and, if so, what is required of whom.

## Site visits

Eleven (11) of the 33 reports (33%) made reference to a site visit (or visits) during the preparation of the report. One company, who prepared five reports (Reports 1, 2, 7, 14 and 24), tended to specify exactly when and for how long site visits were executed:

Site visits carried out between 7:30am and 9:30am on 17 October 2008 (Report 2:5).

In another of their reports, they provided more detailed information:

In a site visit to the area on Saturday 24 May at 7pm, it was observed that vehicles queuing to enter the car park along [name removed] Road back to the intersection of [name removed] Street. Although there is a controlled crossing on [name removed] Road at the entrance of the car park, there was some conflict with pedestrians trying to cross the lanes of traffic entering and exiting the [name removed] car park ... Four street lights on [name removed] Road adjacent to the entrance were not operating, contributing to a poorly lit environment. [name removed] Park was also poorly lit (Report 27:16).

Other reports were less specific.

Site visit and assessment for the proposed area to be developed and surrounds (Report 27:1).

It is difficult to determine the exact benefits of site visits from reviewing those crime risk assessment reports in which site visits were mentioned. There is little information provided in the reports that demonstrates how these site visits informed the crime risk assessment. That said, it is perhaps intrinsically beneficial to conduct a site visit to understand the relationship between the proposed development and adjacent land uses. As Minnery and Lim (2005:331) have rightly pointed out, 'CPTED is a local, intimate, small-scale phenomenon'. Consequently, it would seem beneficial for site visits to be conducted to understand the local and intimate relationships between buildings in the area and potential impacts of surrounding venues.

### **Review of architectural plans**

Twenty-three (23) of the 33 reports (70%) made explicit reference to architectural plans of the proposed development. Analysis and commentary of the proposed plans and identification of the associated crime risks (and mitigating strategies) would seem fundamental to the development of a crime risk assessment report. While there is no direction in the Guidelines that stipulates that the architectural plans must be considered, it would seem self-evident that the architectural plans would form the basis of any crime risk assessment. Since the crime risk assessments were prepared at different points in a development process, and because some of the crime risk assessments were embedded in other reports, it is difficult to assert this finding with absolute confidence. For instance, where a crime risk assessment was part of a larger report, more detailed commentary about the architectural plans might have been made in other parts of the overall report. Consequently, this finding should be considered with some caution.

Nonetheless, explicit reference to architectural plans would seem to be a critical feature of a crime risk assessment. Consider the following statement, in light of the absence of any reference to specific plans or drawings:

The proposal will provide a high level of site security at its public domain interface. The development has been designed to provide for a high level of casual surveillance and clear definition of communal and private spaces (Report 9:4)

Statements like these are somewhat hollow without clear reference to plans or drawings.

### **Recommendations and findings of the crime risk assessment reports**

Seventeen (17) of the 33 reports (52%) included recommendations about how crime risks could be mitigated or managed, and seven of the 33 reports (21%) contained overt adverse findings. In some cases, recommendations were explicitly made and labelled as such. In other cases, recommendations were buried in the reports. This made it difficult to determine exactly if a report did or did not contain a recommendation. Similarly, deciding if a particular statement constituted an adverse finding was somewhat subjective. In the context of the overall report, there are many characteristics that might mask an adverse finding. Nonetheless, there was a greater tendency to highlight positive, as opposed to negative, features of the development, as demonstrated by the following statements.

The proposal has a positive impact with regard to crime prevention of its surroundings. The development's location overlooking street, carpark, parkland, public pool and waterfront walk will offer added security to the public domain (Report 28:3).

The proposal has been designed to achieve an acceptable level of safety and security and is consistent with the CPTED principles outlined in this assessment. Passive surveillance is

created by the development through the large areas of glazing... Territorial reinforcement will also ensure that public and private domains are clearly distinguishable. This has been achieved by the design of the building... Overall, the design of the proposal should see crime deterred in line with the objectives of the above CPTED principles (Report 21:3).

Given that the process of getting a development application approved is partly adversarial (ie developer proposes what they want to do with a site and the consent authority is responsible for ensuring that the various planning controls have been met), there is great potential for the crime risk assessment reports to do just enough to comply with statutory conditions. As noted earlier, seven of the 33 reports (21%) contained adverse findings. This raises fundamental questions about the utility of the current NSW system. If the process now largely involves the engagement of 'sympathetic' consultants who prepare mostly positive reports using the language of CPTED to sing the praises of particular developments, then it is questionable whether any real changes are made to ensure that proposed developments do, in fact, minimise or mitigate potential crime risks.

### **Magical CPTED thinking and the art of speaking CPTED**

A striking feature of many of the reports was the regurgitation of (frequently) similar material about CPTED. As has been stated, all reports contained generic information about CPTED and the four key principles covered by the Guidelines. At times it seems that by merely defining CPTED and the key principles, it can be assumed that crime risks have been mitigated. The mere provision of standard text explaining CPTED principles seems to be read as ensuring that the proposed development has necessarily addressed these principles. Much greater clarity, it is argued, is needed on how these concepts have been employed in the proposed development.

It is also argued that what could be termed, 'magical CPTED thinking', can be found in many of the crime risk assessment reports. This mode of operating assumes that the CPTED principles work in all circumstances all of the time. It ignores the debates regarding the efficacy of all elements of CPTED and underplays the complex interactions between people and places (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Davis 1998; Shaftoe 2004; Shaftoe and Read 2005; Schneider and Kitchen 2007; Newburn 2007; Reynald and Effer 2009). Rather, statements are made confidently that particular strategies will invariably minimise or mitigate crime risks. Some examples of this magical CPTED thinking are provided below.

The overhead bridge link and sculpture stairs maintain good visibility while the building terrace and laneways appear adequately open ... As the ground level of the building will encompass cafes and retail outlets, open spaces have been employed to encourage people to interact with one-another (Report 6:3).

... the implementation and application of CPTED strategies are well established, and are now globally accepted as an important tool that can be successfully applied to the design and layout of buildings, commercial centres and residential sectors, that do have an impact on crime (Report 11:2).

The central courtyard is the centre of the hotel activity and is overlooked by hotel rooms and directly viewed and accessed from hotel lobby/lounge with reception. The courtyard would act as a safe haven (Report 28:3).

Overall, it is considered that the functional planning and the proposed design detail and services will provide an environment which is secure for the building's users and minimise the likelihood of petty crime (Report 12:7).



As demonstrated through this assessment, the proposed expansion of [name removed] complies with Department of Planning guidelines titled '*Crime prevention and the assessment of development applications*' (2001) and therefore uses appropriate design measures to minimise the incidence of crime.

The following provides a summary of the key findings of this CPTED assessment:

- Necessary safety sightlines are provided through the landscape design which is focused around the perimeter of the site. Plant species will minimise anti social behavior through maintaining passive surveillance while providing high visibility and clear sightlines;
- Landscaping delineates the development from the surrounding public street network and direct pedestrian movement;
- Signage and designated pedestrian path markings guide [facility] users throughout the car parking. This allows maximum sightlines to ensure safe movement through the car park areas and minimises conflict with vehicles (Report 31:11).

There are numerous reasons to challenge the confidence of these assertions. By simply stating how a proposed development incorporates CPTED and through the artful use CPTED vernacular, it is as if the crime risk assessment reports have served their purpose, fulfilled their function. Engaging in equivocal analysis and commentary might be seen as undermining the efforts to get the development application, concept plan or master plan approved. Consequently, it seems that the tendency to overstate the merits of CPTED creeps into crime risk assessment reports.

## Conclusion

As has been shown, the analysis of the 33 crime risk assessment reports compiled for developments in NSW between 1 January 2007 and 31 October 2010, revealed that the reports were (on average) 11 pages in length. They generally contained generic CPTED information and included references to architectural plans. Just under half contained crime data and one in three of the reports included demographic data for the planned area of the development. The limited use of crime and demographic data seems to be in direct contradiction of the Guidelines.

A little over a third of the reports referred to consultations with key stakeholders and only 12 reports (36%) made any mention of consultation with police as part of the assessment process. Given that the Guidelines state that 'typically, crime risk assessments are conducted in cooperation with trained local police' (DUAP 2001:2), it would seem that this requirement is not routinely achieved. Moreover, approximately one-in-five reports made any adverse findings, although half contained recommendations about how the development might address potential crime risks.

Based on the analysis of the 33 crime risk assessment reports, it would seem that the relevant NSW Guidelines provide inadequate direction for the development of crime risk assessment reports. Where more specific direction is provided, it would appear that the Guidelines are not always followed. The overall utility of the Guidelines and crime risk assessment reports is called into question when one company submits almost identical crime risk assessment reports for different developments, and the reports generally tend to highlight the positive features of a proposed development through the use of CPTED vernacular.

This article's argument is not that crime risk assessments and the processes in which they are developed are, by nature, meaningless. Indeed, if produced well and taken seriously, there is little doubt they have some role to play in the prevention of crime. However, if crime risk assessments are constitutive of the pre-crime paradigm outlined by Zedner (2007), or are part of a broader preventive turn (Hughes 2007), this modest analysis of the current NSW process would indicate that the documents, and the process in which they function as containers of knowledge, pays little more than lip service to the prevention of crime risks. While further analysis is required, it is suggested that crime risk assessments in NSW are currently operating as little more than legitimising documents. As documents that have pretence to minimise the risks of crime and victimisation, and speak the language of risk minimisation, their utility is extremely questionable. Rather, these documents appear to function within a particular 'knowledge network', where procedural ambiguity regarding section 79c of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW) and institutional disinterest has led to the production of largely questionable crime risk assessments and a largely meaningless process.

## Legislation

*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW)

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