

The Queensland Community Crime Prevention Program and CPTED

Paper to be presented at the
9th Annual International CPTED Association Conference
People & Safer Communities: the CPTED Advantage
13-16 September 2004
Brisbane, Australia

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The Queensland Government is implementing a *Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention*. The Strategic Framework is principally concerned with engaging the Queensland Government – through a partnership with local government – with communities, around concerns relating to crime and community safety.

The Strategic Framework reframes the way that crime is managed. Traditional responses to crime through the criminal justice system will probably always be needed, but a community crime prevention approach recognises that the management of crime is fundamentally a whole-of-community responsibility. Crime does not occur in isolation, but in a community or social context. Most offenders do not suddenly commit a serious offence; rather, serious offenders tend to have histories which commenced with minor anti-social behaviours many years before.

Community crime prevention seeks to define the contexts in which offending occurs, and to identify the risk and protective factors which influence offending behaviours: thence to intervene to change contexts and move factors in positive directions. CPTED – Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design – particularly Social CPTED, has significant potential as an intervention tool to help achieve this direction.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the use of Social CPTED within the implementation of the Queensland *Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention*. I shall first quickly explain the basics of the Strategic Framework, and then outline how CPTED has been incorporated in local crime prevention projects.

The Queensland *Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention*

In 2001, Crime Prevention Queensland commissioned a literature review to document the features of good practice relevant to the role of central government in managing community crime prevention. The review drew from best practice both within Australia and overseas, and also considered cross-sectoral partnership approaches in addressing other social issues outside of the criminal justice arena.

Common features of good practice models of community crime prevention were found to be:

- explicit commitment to a partnership approach between public, business and community sectors
- a focus on intervention at the local community level, targeting local needs and circumstances
- multi-agency coordination, at both strategic and operational levels, in planning and delivery of services relevant to crime prevention and community safety
- community participation in the identification of local problems and their solutions
- a central organisational structure at federal and/or state level providing strategic and funding support to community-based arrangements
- recognition of the pivotal role of local/municipal governments.

(Henderson 2001; Gadsden & Henderson 2003)

These features were inbuilt into the Strategic Framework model.

- The implementation of the Strategic Framework is founded in partnerships between the Queensland Government, local government, and the local community.
- Local action teams, called BSCATs – Building Safer Communities Action Teams – are formed in each participating local government area, to identify the local incidence and causes of crime and community safety concerns, and develop and implement and evaluate local strategies to address those concerns. Members of BSCATs come from the local Council, Police, business, community services, community groups, and government departments.
- BSCATs are linked into Regional Networks comprising local MPs, governmental departmental managers, regional organisations, to assist local and regional coordination and collaboration.
- BSCATs collect and collate their own Local Area Profiles, comprising statistical and anecdotal data relating to local concerns. They consult their communities to fill gaps in available data. These Profiles provide a comprehensive and evolving evidence base upon which action planning and evaluation is founded.
- The Queensland Government provides continuing support for BSCATs through Crime Prevention Queensland: through the employment of Regional Crime Prevention Resource Officers, the provision of an establishment grant, a Learning and Development Program for team members, access to research and knowledge relevant to local crime prevention activities, and improved coordination across government programs impacting on crime prevention.
- Local governments have an ongoing and definite role in supporting BSCATs, as well as gaining benefits to their core business through better crime prevention practice in planning and development approvals, management of parks and amenities, and community development.

(Qld Govt 2002)

BSCATs in Queensland

Thus far, nine Building Safer Communities Action Teams have been established in Queensland. Whitsunday, Mackay, Noosa and Maroochy were the first four BSCATs formed, with their first meetings between August and October 2003. In the time since, each Team has completed a Learning and Development Program which sets the boundaries, methodologies, and directions of the Team and builds team cohesion, each has developed a local evidence base of their area and identified the most important local issues, and each is now heavily immersed in planning strategies to address those issues.

Another four BSCATs, located at Toowoomba, Gatton, Bowen and Sarina, have just completed, or are nearing completion of, the Learning and Development Program and their local evidence profile. Isis has just commenced their Learning and Development.

Across the BSCATs which have identified priority issues, there are some common concerns being raised across several local government areas, and there are also some differences.

- Family and domestic violence (which includes child abuse/neglect), perceptions of community safety in public spaces, and alcohol and drug misuse, are more frequent concerns.
- Offending by young people and property crimes are rating higher in some areas than in others.
- Importantly, some issues which appear regularly in the media or are popular with television dramas, are not being listed as priorities: for example, safety amongst elderly or frail people, sexual offending, and the release of ex-prisoners to the community.

CPTED and its Social Cousin

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is premised on the hypothesis that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime and the incidence of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life”. (Crowe 1991: 1) Numerous practitioners have argued that CPTED’s concentration on the built environment – or at least on the physical environment – risks being framed as ‘architectural determinism’ for being too narrowly focussed. Crime involves people.

- In developing the concept ‘Second Generation CPTED’, Saville has argued that “a consequence of fortressing (e.g. of walled/gated communities, or of homes with burglar alarms and a contract with the local security company) is higher levels of fear of crime, ... (which) is damaging to the integrity of cities’ form. There are more effective ways to ensure safety, such as caring neighbours who watch out for your property, and neighbourhoods that make it difficult for the offender to operate anonymously.” (Saville & Wright 1998: 1-2)
- Altes & van Soomeren (1998) have argued that “crime is essentially a social problem, not a technical one. Technical solutions like CCTV and target hardening can never be the structural answer to a crime problem.”
- Sherry Carter, in a concept which she has labelled ‘Community CPTED’, states that “Community CPTED examines the interaction of physical, social and economic conditions and uses the details of the built environment and social behaviour to develop CPTED strategies. It involves the development of community-wide recommendations, that when used collectively will synergistically enhance and sustain safety and well-being.” (2002: 24)
- Todd Schneider (2001) refers to ‘Affective CPTED’ in applying CPTED concepts to set the emotional or affective tone of an environment: in setting behavioural expectations, training of staff, constructive interventions to disruptive behaviours, problem solving methodologies, and responding to counterproductive messages.

The common theme across the concepts of Second Generation CPTED, Community CPTED, and Affective CPTED – which I shall group as ‘Social CPTED’ for reasons of simplicity – is that crime and anti-social behaviour may occur within a physical environment, but the interaction(s) between the offender and victim and the physical environment are social. (Homel 2001) The context of a crime has both physical and social aspects. Physical environments may provide social cues as to what types of behaviour may be desirable and acceptable, but user’s interpretations of physical environments in identifying those social cues are personal, social and cultural. In short, physical environments need to be designed utilising

social cues which reinforce each other, and in cognisance of the known social backgrounds of prospective users.

Because crime involves people, situational crime prevention approaches, including CPTED, do not work well in isolation: they are prone to displace crime and anti-social behaviours to other locations, and/or find that any reduction in crime is short-lived. Rather, the combination of situational approaches with other developmental and community crime prevention initiatives – together with criminal justice – offers a multi-pronged alternative to preventing crime, meaning that reductions in crime are likely to last longer, and other social ills may also be addressed in the process. (Blazevic 2004: 17-18)

A multi-disciplinary approach, utilising knowledge from architecture and planning but also policing, psychology and sociology, social and community work, social planning, anthropology, economics, and other disciplines as relevant, will help identify the social and cultural interpretations of cues. The understanding and integration of individual and personal differences into environmental design requires the involvement of individuals and groups who may have different experiences and perspectives on life: women, children, migrants, people with disabilities, previous victims, homeless people, Indigenous people.

A useful distinction herein is to separate ‘CPTED as product’ from ‘CPTED as process’. The concept of ‘CPTED as product’ is familiar: the guides, the observations, the recommendations, the reports. ‘CPTED as process’ refers to the organisation of – for example – a safety audit, who is involved or engaged in the process, how is it organised to encourage and enhance participation, how are the recommendations formulated, what relationships are created or strengthened, etc. In considering social CPTED, and in using CPTED as a tool in community crime prevention, ‘CPTED as process’ may be just as important as the finished ‘product’.

BSCATs and Social CPTED

BSCATs are in a unique position to encourage and facilitate the adoption of multi-disciplinary and citizen-based engagement in environmental design and planning. They comprise leaders from local government, police, and government departments. But BSCATs also comprise leaders from the community, workers from community services, and representatives from community groups – those who are working with and for individuals and groups who may otherwise be marginalised from active civic life. As well as advocating on behalf of those for and with whom they are working, these community leaders can facilitate the engagement of marginalised groups into relevant initiatives, building community connectedness and social capital within communities. If successful, a notable by-product of this approach is the potential for a reduction in the fear of crime within communities, and a building of citizens’ sense of personal and community safety.

Some examples might illustrate how Social CPTED is proving to be a valuable tool for BSCATs across Queensland.

- Whitsunday BSCAT has joined with the Whitsunday Public Safety Task Force to address some local issues relating to community safety in the vicinity of licensed premises. All local licensees are members of the WPSTF, and they and BSCAT members are planning

safety audits of the CBD later this year, to encourage safer environmental design in the CBD area.

- Mackay BSCAT is meeting with the local consultant for *Shaping Mackay* – a project to enhance the city centre – and Council’s planning staff, in sharing their expertise in policing, youth and community development, and business, to encourage safer environmental design in re-developments to city centre.
- Sarina BSCAT has invited local businesses neighbouring a local park, and young people who frequent the park, to join with them in a safety audit – not just in the audit, but in developing strategies to enhance the environmental design in a possible redevelopment of the park into a major neighbourhood focal point and tourist attraction.
- In an initiative to combat anti-social behaviours in public spaces in Maroochydoore – graffiti, vandalism, public intoxication and assault – the Maroochy BSCAT is undertaking a lighting survey in public spaces which have been identified as ‘hot spots’ in the Shire. This is giving prominence to one tool of CPTED, as it is deemed to be the most relevant in this context.

Community, BSCATs, CPTED – a Challenge

I will conclude by presenting a challenge which underlies the work of BSCATs in Queensland, and has particular relevance to the use of urban design and CPTED strategies.

“One test for a good city lies in the capacity to walk the streets in safety: day or night, rich or poor, male or female, black or white, old or young. But another test lies in the capacity for all its citizens to gain access to the overwhelming vitality and diversity of urban life. The task is not to choose between, but rather to reconcile these imperatives. It is one of understanding, managing and engaging with safety and danger in a creative and civilised manner.”

(Dovey 1998: 7)

BSCATs are local action teams, comprising local community leaders from different walks of life, and established to use their local knowledge in developing local solutions to local problems in crime and community safety. BSCATs are operating at the interface between crime and anti-social behaviours, and their contexts and causes. How BSCATs intervene at that interface, and how effective they are in changing the interface to reduce crime and anti-social behaviours, may have a considerable impact on the capacity of citizens to ‘walk the streets in safety’, and on their capacity to ‘gain access to the overwhelming vitality and diversity of urban life’.

ENDS (2,057 words)

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