

# **PUBLIC SPACES AND COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION**

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides a discussion of issues relating to public places, urban planning and community crime prevention. The first part of the paper examines the social nature of public space from the point of view of ownership, uses and users, urban design and regulation. The second part of the paper explores the application of crime prevention approaches and techniques to the planning and management of public places, and provides examples of innovative practices and strategic planning processes.

### **Author Note**

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## Introduction

Developing safer cities and diminishing the fear of crime ought to be a central component of any planning process. The intention of this paper is to contribute toward these objectives by discussing how crime prevention techniques and approaches can be applied to the construction and regulation of public spaces.

The aims of the paper are first, to examine the social nature of public space from the point of view of the ownership, uses and users of this space, and secondly, to discuss the development of appropriate crime prevention strategies in relation to public space issues. The paper begins by reviewing general developments with regard to the nature of city life and consumer culture, how people actually use the street and mall facilities, and issues associated with the planning and design of commercial areas such as shopping centres. The paper then considers the nature of social regulation, by both state police and private firms, of public spaces, especially those with a predominantly commercial focus. The final sections provide an extended overview of crime prevention, with particular attention given to the 'accommodating' approach, and how planning and design considerations can be intertwined with preventative principles and strategies.

## Social Dimensions of Public Space

The construction of public space is a social process with a number of sociological, environmental, planning and economic dimensions (see for example, Castles, 1989; Davis, 1990; Harvey, 1990; Stilwell, 1993). For present purposes, three key dimensions can be highlighted. These are the *ownership* of public space, *control over access* to public space, and the *designated uses* of public space.

At a formal institutional level, public space can be described in terms of the following demarcations (see White, 1996: 46):

- state-owned and open public access (e.g., walking malls and courtyards, parks, ovals, beaches)
- state-owned but some restrictions in access and use (e.g., sports grounds, some beaches, school yards, showgrounds)
- privately-owned but open public access (e.g., shopping centres, malls)
- privately-owned and exclusive private access (e.g., clubs, recreation areas, golf courses).

It thus needs to be acknowledged that the existing uses and basis for access to space vary depending upon the institutional logic surrounding its construction (e.g., private profit, community benefit). It can also be observed that certain users of public space will occupy a privileged status in particular types of public space, and that this depends upon its location, the time of day and the functional roles associated with its use (e.g., educational or commercial purposes).

The form of urban space has fundamentally been shaped by the contours of economic development and class-related social processes over the last one hundred and fifty years. The types of housing and amenity in a neighbourhood, the policing of street life, and different patterns of use of parks and pavements, have always been symptomatic of broader social divisions and differences. Where you live is a major indicator of economic and social well-being (Gregory & Hunter, 1995; Walmsely & Weinand, 1997). While class relations have

underpinned the social construction of space (Katznelson, 1993), the social relations of space have in turn also been reflective of gender, 'race' and ethnic differences in how different groups can or should enjoy the public domains of the city (Sassen, 1993; Painter, 1992).

The very definition of 'public space' has been the subject of much contestation between different classes, as has the purposes and behaviours deemed to be appropriate within any such space (Worpole & Greenhalgh, 1996). In the Australian context, for example, the working class traditions of using the street as a multi-functional social space has long been a source of middle-class consternation. Media-driven concerns about the larrikin 'pushes' in Sydney and Brisbane at the turn of the century heightened bourgeois fears about the anarchic conditions of city life and the 'depraved' condition of much working class youth culture (Murray, 1973; Finch, 1993). The answer then, as now, was often to pursue policies of strong policing and social exclusion for selected groups (Finnane, 1994).

Finch (1993: 76) describes how the street as a multi-functional space was transformed architecturally and socially into a more circumscribed and regulated place with the advent of consumer-oriented capitalism. The new wider boulevards allowed strolling, and were intrinsically linked to middle class use and commercial purposes: 'The late nineteenth century metropolitan streetscape drew women out from the suburbs, turned shopping into leisure activity which occupied the entire day, and created 'public women' among the respectable middle and working classes'. The modification of the cityscape thus occurred simultaneously with major changes in the production and consumption patterns of society. Narrowly defined uses for the street, the presence of female shoppers, and establishment of particular sites such as railway stations and public parks in which all classes had a presence were essential new features in the reconstitution of city life.

Public spaces have changed in concept and design over the years, depending upon the ebbs and flows of economic development and social conflict. In the present era, the social construction of public space is dominated by a series of interrelated developments. The first of these is the rise of *consumerism* as a major global phenomenon. Consumption - defined here as the purchase of goods and services (commodities) - has become the dominant public value in social life, at least in terms of media portrayal and political rhetoric. For example, the promotion of capital cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, is largely through appeal to mega-events and spectacles, from Grand Prix to Olympics, Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras to Melbourne Arts Festival. At a more mundane level, the viability of cities is increasingly portrayed as being dependent upon the provision of specific urban sites which are cosmopolitan, consumer-friendly enclaves in which to live, and particular districts, with their huge entertainment complexes and multitudinous shops, as the epitome of the consumer cathedrals of capitalism.

The buyer-seller nexus now appears to be the hub around which social life is meant to revolve. This is reflected in political policies and planning objectives which are designed to attract retail and service based businesses to central business districts and major regional centres. Development is paramount, and commercially-created places rather than publicly planned spaces have come to dominate. This is so even in the light of the continued maintenance of publicly planned space, such as the St.Kilda foreshore in Melbourne. Public space is basically being defined by consumption activities and uses, rather than other sorts of values.

The privileging of consumption and commercial activity has been accelerated in recent years through the *privatisation* of space. This privatisation occurs on several fronts. For example, it is associated with the privatisation of functions, such as the contracting out of the maintenance and management of public parks. It is linked to withdrawal of needed state financial support for certain services, as with public housing and rural train services. It is tied to the selling off of government services to private companies, as with road construction and public transport. Privatisation also refers to the ability of large corporations to buy into and buy up public landscapes, through state guarantees of profit or outright purchase, as with school sites.

Privatisation in essence means to make private. And to make private is to transfer effective ownership and control out of public hands and into private ones, and to view the functional purposes of public spaces and amenities in commercial rather than community terms. Viability is not conceived in terms of meeting a particular social need; it is a cost-benefit economic calculation. Nor is accountability construed in the same way. For the bottom line is at the accountant's behest, not the community's. This raises big issues with respect to participatory planning, consultative mechanisms and regulatory enforcement of public interest principles.

Under privatisation, it is 'the client' who counts. Yet, even so, in many instances the planning of central squares, malls and shopping complexes ends up working better for communities, as seen in cases where more people congregate in convivial fashion because of the activities in such places, not all of which are not commercially based. The commercial focus of such places does not mean one can always predict how people will use them, what kind of activities take place and which sorts of relationships are formed. As Beattie and Lehmann (1994: 79) put it:

Not only do intentions regarding public and private use of space often have unexpected outcomes but there is a degree of unpredictability about the things that people do in public space. In fact people seldom seem to be doing what they are expected to do and it is the unexpected that is most interesting.

While unintended consequences, and community benefits, may arise from specific constructions, the rationale behind planning and design nevertheless places rough boundaries on the kinds of activities likely to happen.

Growing disparities are now manifest at broad regional levels, as evidenced in the social and spatial polarisation of Australian cities (Johnson, 1994; Troy, 1995; Gregory & Hunter, 1996). As research in the advanced industrialised countries has shown, this translates into high income earners living in desirable suburbs, inner-city apartments and regenerated historical areas, and the low-paid and unemployed living in decaying urban spaces (see Johnson, 1994; Davis, 1990; Castells, 1989). The notion of leaving urban development primarily in the hands of private enterprise also implies that it is the market which will determine social outcomes, with potentially unequal community impacts. As Peel (1996: 16) comments:

Where change reduces choices or lowers amenity, for instance, the market will provide escape routes for those who can pay. The people most likely to experience the unwanted by-products - noise, pollution, rising rents - of other people's freedom to choose are also those who cannot afford to buy their way out. This includes those

people who have not yet established themselves in the market: it is the next generation who will be asked to accept smaller houses and smaller private yards as standard. It is in Sydney's already under-serviced western suburbs, not the North Shore, that dual occupancy and medium-density developments are causing headaches.

The privatisation of the city at one and the same time implies a re-configuration of basic social relationships and public values.

A third feature which characterises much of the urban renewal and redevelopment process is that of the *intensification of public space regulation*. Again, this takes different forms. It can be seen in the examples of gated suburbs and urban fortresses. Furthermore, the fear of crime, and privatised means of security, have in themselves become a commodity - selling newspapers and specific products for those who wish to pay. Urban planning thus becomes intertwined with crime prevention and security assessment.

To this we can add a few observations regarding the protection of commercial enterprises. Felson (1987), for example, speaks of the emergence of the 'great metropolitan quilt' in the United States, where reliance on the car has led to a patchwork of co-determinous facilities (e.g., shopping malls and centres) intervening between homes, businesses and the larger society. Urban space, in this scenario, is divided up by a large set of corporations which, in turn, would (and should) be responsible for organising everyday movements, including security. The dominance of such facilities means that architects, security planners and facilities managers associated with these complexes become the central actors in the crime prevention process.

## **Consumers, Citizens and Life in Public**

Much of the concern over crime prevention in public places has revolved specifically around the presence and activities of young people in these places (White, 1998a). This can be misleading in a number of ways. An assumption is sometimes made, for instance, that older people use public space in more defined, restrictive ways than young people, that their only identification is that as 'consumers', and that somehow older people are relatively homogenous as a users of public space or as consumers.

As indicated above, there seems to be little doubt that consumerism has had a major impact on social life. The urban landscape is now in many ways shaped by the dictates of consumption, which is legitimated through political rhetoric and policies which equate extensive consumption with the good of the people. It would appear that 'Consumerism, that is the active ideology that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences, pervades modern capitalism' (Bocock, 1993: 48). Moreover, it has been argued that what and how we consume has become an essential part of the way in which people construct a sense of who they are, of basic social identity. Be this as it may, it is still essential to recognise other ways of being beyond that of consumption, and to be sensitive to the different ways in which people engage in the consumption process.

For example, in examination of the use of public spaces in general, it is simply not accurate to describe all older people exclusively as consumers. Like young people, older people come from a wide variety of social backgrounds and use public spaces in a multitude of different ways. It is important not to forget the 'simple' pleasures associated with public space,

pleasures which are about human relationships, networks and non-commercial activities. Worpole and Greenhalgh (1996: 36) express this nicely in the following observation:

As we have found time and time again in our research, what people most often value about the twice weekly visit to the library, or even the daily stroll in the park, is an opportunity to meet other people whether they are neighbours, relatives, close or casual friends, and to have their social identity confirmed in the process of these spontaneous, unorganised encounters. Our social identity is partly formed by these public appearances and relationships, and although they can also happen in private or commercial settings, there does seem to be something different about life in the free, non-instrumental sanctuary of the library or the park, where one is a citizen rather than a consumer.

The use of public spaces - such as beaches, malls, the street, bushland and shopping centres - is not entirely consumption oriented. Older people are likewise prone to 'hanging out' in such spaces, regardless of the functional imperatives of commercial enterprises.

The feeling of connection, the sense of excitement and the exhilaration of being in and around others is not unique to young people. Much is said about the fear of crime and victimisation associated with public incivilities, crime and homelessness. However, little is said about how the appearance of some degree of 'social disorganisation' is itself a source of pleasure. Indeed, the contrast between highly sanitised, extensively regulated spaces (as in some shopping complexes) and less pristine urban environments with less overt social controls makes the latter a desirable place to visit for many people, at least on an occasional basis.

Some public spaces are likely to attract older people precisely because of the unstructured, unorganised nature of the space. This is partly borne out by a recent Adelaide study, which found a fair degree of tolerance for misbehaviour or incivility on Hindley Street according to the people surveyed (Morgan, Pudsey & Roach Anleu, 1997). In other words, the use of certain public places carried with it expectations regarding what is likely to occur in those places, and a realistic assessment that street life, to be exciting and interesting, necessarily includes some negative features. The reality is that different people want different things in and from public spaces, at different times of the day. This holds true for older people as it does for younger. Similarly, the over-regulation of public spaces can put people off in much the same way that a lack of appropriate social regulation can make people reticent to visit some places.

The heterogenous nature of public space use is also reflected in activities in specific venues or locations. A study of people's interrelationships with malls as consumption sites, for example, found patterned variations in mall use (Bloch, Ridgway & Dawson, 1994). Mall 'inhabitants' were found to be comprised of four distinctive groups:

- mall *enthusiasts*, who engage in a wide range of behaviours that include relatively high levels of purchasing, usage of the mall, and experiential consumption
- mall *traditionalists*, who have higher than average mall-focussed activities such as walking in the mall for exercise, and who are relatively high product purchasers, but who are relatively unlikely to browse, eat or consume services

- mall *grazers*, who have a higher than average tendency to pass time in a mall browsing and eating, engage in impulse buying during their browsing, but who rarely socialise or engage in other kinds of mall-oriented activity
- mall *minimalists*, who have relatively low participation rates in all mall activities, and who appear to desire to get in and out of the mall as efficiently as possible

There is no such thing, then, as a typical consumer. Different people exhibit very different sorts of relationships with the shopping centre environment, and engage in substantially different kinds of activities while in such a setting.

The variability in uses of public spaces, and commercial sites, among older people parallels the diversity of youth responses to and uses of public space. This raises the bigger issue of the relationship between young people and older people, and the *commonalities* of experience, ways of being, and relationship to wider social institutions. There is a tendency in popular discourse and youth studies research, for example, to separate out young people from their immediate community positions as members of particular class, gender, ethnic and indigenous communities (Wyn & White, 1997: 79). Hence:

What gets emphasised is their unique characteristics as members of a particular category of youth (for example, punk, Rasta, hiphop, graffiti, street dancers, surfies, skegs, wogs, druggies). What gets under-emphasised or unacknowledged are the continuities in culture (for example, language, world view, dress, relationship to 'outside' institutions such as school, police and work) which transcend the generations.

Yet, shared experiences of people across the generation divide implies that in many instances it is not age, but social group membership, which is the most significant factor in how people use public space, and how they are responded to by authority figures. This is most clearly evident in the case of indigenous people in Australia.

At a more mundane level, it needs to be acknowledged that many of the activities in which young people engage in public spaces are likewise characteristic of adult use. These range from participation in various kinds of uncivil behaviour, such as being drunk or making excessive noise, through to using in-line skates as a form of recreation or to get to work. The perceptions of youth as a problem therefore have to be tempered by the realisation that many of the behaviours which are the target of condemnation and chastisement are behaviours not unique to young people per se.

Too often older people are lumped together into an amorphous entity called 'the public', as if every adult feels the same way about public space issues or sees the problems relating to street life the same. This ignores the profound social differences, and social divisions, which colour the ways in which parents, consumers, citizens and residents respond to and interact with the world around them.

On the other hand, apparent public disquiet about young people's use of public space highlights the power of the media in portraying, and to some extent, creating a consensus about the nature of the problem. The fact that young people tend to hang around in groups, are vulnerable socially and politically, and are highly visible due to modes of dress and sheer numbers, means that they are easy targets for various kinds of 'moral panics' in regard to

their presumed behaviours. While different communities have different perceptions and experiences when it comes to how their children and young people interact with and in the urban environment, the notion of public (rather than publics) opinion is a powerful one, one which in turn has major consequences for shaping the ideas of the populace at large.

It is apparent that many public space sites in Australia today are increasingly in the private domain. Hence, 'the spatially dispersed landscape of detached houses has become dominated by a succession of private realms - special or not - and makes the experiences of traditional special, and public, spaces - and the city centre itself - increasingly rare (Beattie & Lehmann, 1994: 79). This raises important questions relating to the ownership and control of public space, the functions of this space, and its regulation. Nowhere are these questions of greater relevance than in the case of the shopping centre.

## **Shopping Centres, Urban Design and Professional Practice**

The shopping centre has evolved to be, for many, the central feature of urban social life. It has assumed a number of symbolic and functional uses, for a wide and diverse range of people. For young people, in particular, it is a major site for meeting together and hanging out.

A shopping centre such as appears in the suburbs of cities (e.g., Chadstone Shopping Centre in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne) is distinct from a shopping district or shopping area such as the retail shopping strip/street (e.g., Chapel Street, Melbourne). The following description explains in more detail what these are. The former is characterised by a group of architecturally unified commercial establishments, built on a site planned, developed, owned and managed as a unit. The latter do not have an overall planned layout or unified operation, are divided into separately owned units, and may vary in locations across a defined geographical area (Ellis, 1987). Some key features of shopping centres include a primary function of retailing; constituted on basis of profit-making private investment; a commercial rationale for decision-making, rather than public needs or interests per se; and management control over what is allowable within a shopping centre is defended and justified on basis of private property rights.

Shopping centres and districts have taken different forms over the years. For instance, in the post-war period, there have been at least three phases of development. Sandercock (1997) describes these phases, based on the United States' experience, as having the following kinds of attributes:

- 1) from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s shopping malls took the format of two department stores anchoring each end of an open air pedestrian mall, facing away from the public street
- 2) after 1956 there was the development of the enclosed mall, with regulated temperatures, completely introverted building type, easier impositions on allowable activities and users, one-stop convenience
- 3) around 1980 the emergence of specialty malls, to fit urban sites which can be re-configured to reflect the unique character of a specific location and customised design, as is evident in theme parks and recycled historic districts

Sandercock (1997) comments that the latter developments are premised upon providing consumers with a clean, sanitised, attractive and safe environment, but one so highly controlled as to deny the real diversity of the urban environment. As a number of critics have likewise argued, the modern shopping centre or shopping mall has a tendency to be designed, policed and regulated in a manner which is intended to exclude particular groups, such as unemployed and homeless people, from their precincts (Davis, 1990; Worpole & Greenhalgh, 1996; White & Sutton, 1995).

Against this broad trend, Sandercock (1997) also points to an alternative example of progressive planning and design, one that is based upon principles of diversity and inclusion (see below). In many cases, however, the overall trend in urban planning and design appears to be undermining these possibilities at the present time in many localities in Australia. This is mainly because of the political imperatives and regulatory restrictions which detract from local government initiatives of this sort, and because of the occupational imperatives of the main professions engaged in urban planning, design and development (White, 1998a).

The apparent intersection of private interests and public interests, for example, is seen in the attempts of local councils to attract investment and development projects into their areas. This includes schemes to rejuvenate publicly owned town centres, as well as partnerships in existing and new mall development. It has been noted in England (Worpole & Greenhalgh, 1996: 38) that in some cases the idea of community revitalisation has been supplanted by (or interpreted as) the notion of customer care:

In those town centre management schemes where the retail interest overwhelms all others, the town centre can become indistinguishable from the indoor shopping centre. The role of the manager is to smooth over difficulties, drive out conflict, market the shops and regulate legitimate street activity (such as collections by local charities) or discourage impromptu and uninvited activity (such as busking).

Similar types of observations have been made about local council relationships to shopping malls in Australia. As Spearritt (1994: 138) comments:

Suburban councils throughout Australia are proud of their suburbs and their facilities, including their grand shopping malls. The annual reports of councils are full of booster prose about new malls or councils' efforts at creating malls in existing shopping centres by restricting traffic and creating a theme atmosphere [including the insistence on specific kinds of facades to all new buildings in keeping with an area's 'ethnic ' character]. This is not unlike the aesthetic edicts issued by managers of freestanding shopping malls.

The issue is not whether or not local councils will be involved with development projects or the shopping centres. Rather, the key questions are under what conditions and in what ways will they have in-put into planning, design and management issues relating to these?

To answer these questions requires acknowledgement of both the financial and political pressures on local councils to operate in particular ways. For instance, a combination of the need to attract regional investment, and shortfalls in existing financial and operational resources, has forced many councils to compete over private investment. This may mean offering companies planning concessions and less stringent consultation rules.

Alternatively, some planning decisions may not be their's to make. The duties and roles of local government are not protected constitutionally or fiscally. This has always put them at risk of state intervention when they are perceived to not be doing what is desired by the state governments. As Mowbray (1996: 28) observes:

Since its inception, the organization of local government in Australia has been driven by ad hoc political opportunism. Councils have been abolished or amalgamated, or had their local plans amended, planning powers removed, or electoral franchises varied to suit the state government of the day, and usually some commercial interest.

This serves as a reminder that whatever the intentions of local councils, anything they do is ultimately circumscribed by the wider political process. The challenge is to incorporate creative people-centred policies into proposals and developments which will then be able to gain broad appeal across a range of constituencies.

Another factor which affects immediate planning and design processes is the nature of professional participation in such processes. Planners employed in local government are aware of the pressures to produce in tight financial times. But changes in local government have often left planning departments so under-resourced that difficulties may arise with regard to the time taken to process applications and in the available skill base. Similar observations have been noted with respect to federal agencies, where high turn-over of staff can significantly reduce the ability of departments to develop a sophisticated understanding of urban planning issues (Troy, 1995). Meanwhile, architects and designers in the private sector may, regardless of personal sentiment, be encumbered by certain occupational imperatives: to work as a private sector professional means taking close heed of commercial concerns, especially since it is the corporate enterprise which is paying for the service. The exception to this is, is tendered work done for government, but even here commercial considerations and resource questions may overlay the development of any particular project.

## **The Regulation of Public Space**

While different institutions (public or private) generally have defined purposes or objectives relating to the use of specific places, often the rhetoric attached to such definitions or the marketing of such areas stresses the 'general community' or universal character of such places. The message is that public places are for the 'people'. However, some people are made more welcome than others in the public domain.

This raises the issue of how such public space is regulated. The mix of privately owned and publicly owned places in any locality is matched by the mix of state police and private security as the key agencies of social control. The objectives of each may vary, from concerns with public order to enforcing dress and behaviour codes, but in practice the relationship each sector has with young people, in particular, is often beset by common problems. How public space is regulated, and how specific forms of regulation are justified or legitimated, are nevertheless shaped or conditioned by the institutional sphere within which it occurs and the organisational imperatives of the agency doing so.

The systematic regulation of young people in public spaces has long been a key aspect of the maintenance of public order as conceived by authority figures (Finnane, 1994; Hogg & Golder, 1987; Cohen, 1979). This is largely due to the fact that, historically, public space was

generally publicly owned, and public order primarily a responsibility of the state. Hence the police have been central players in the leisure and spare-time activities of young people, especially working class young people and indigenous young people. Young people have used streets, beaches, malls and shopping areas as prime sites for their un-structured activities, and it is these areas which have received the main attentions of state police services.

In many places the favoured approach to the regulation of public space, particularly as this pertains to young people, is that of the use of coercion (see White, 1998a). This may be reflected in the language of 'zero tolerance' in which any behaviour, activity or group which is deemed to be anti-social is not to be tolerated by authorities. Such an approach relies heavily upon direct police intervention, and, increasingly, intervention by private police and security guards. In practice, it may manifest in the stepped-up use of 'name-checks' (e.g., asking young people their names and addresses) and 'move-on' powers (e.g., the right to ask young people to move away from certain areas).

In many instances, however, such an approach merely exacerbates bad feeling between the targets of intervention (e.g., marginalised young people, homeless people) and police, shopkeepers and general consumers. It can also undercut the basic principles and practices of 'community policing' insofar as coercion rather than co-operation, social exclusion rather than participatory inclusion, and street-sweeping rather than problem-solving, become the primary basis of interaction (see White & Perrone, 1997).

The relationship between state policing and private policing is reflective of broader changes occurring to the urban landscape. Whether a site is publicly accessible, while privately owned, or if it has explicit restrictive access, makes a difference in the kind of policing that will be in place. In some residential areas and sites, for example, residents are protected by private security firms. Access is controlled by the firms, as is routine patrolling of the site. The architecture and planning of such residences and residential areas tends to be designed with specific security and access objectives, which by their very nature are exclusive of the general public. Interestingly, it has been suggested that in such circumstances, off-site areas, such as surrounding streets, become the proper domain of state police, with the implication that 'good' citizens will remain in their enclaves, while 'bad' citizens are identified by being on the streets (see Davies, 1985).

For most people, however, public space issues revolve around publicly accessible privately owned sites such as shopping centres. The regulation of public space in this instance is not driven by concerns with public order per se. Rather, most policing strategies are premised on the idea of promoting such spaces as 'consumer' spaces and doing whatever is necessary to facilitate consumption.

The main concern of commercial enterprises is to prevent crime in the most effective way possible and to ensure that behaviour in the site best matches the commercial objectives of the trader or corporation. This is reflected in a recent report which discussed the ways in which groups of young people gathering in Launceston's Mall have caused concern to some citizens and business owners (Challenger, 1997). The sorts of behaviour which were identified as being undesirable included:

- occasionally intimidating or harassing mall users
- fighting with each other outside, sometimes spilling over into stores

- causing anxiety to staff and customers when roaming within stores
- causing damage to property
- being nuisances in stores and jeopardising the safety of customers and staff (e.g., running through stores)
- stealing goods from the stores

Similar findings were also apparent in a Melbourne study, which found that retail staff in a large shopping complex felt that 'loitering', 'rowdiness', 'offensive behaviour' and 'shoplifting' were significant issues (Bruce, 1997).

In response to these kinds of activities, many site managers attempt to modify their sales environment or beef up security in some way. Rule of access, public availability, and behaviour are set by site managers. This varies from site to site. One example of dress and behaviour codes associated with a shopping centre is that of the St.Louis Galleria in the United States. The information brochure for this shopping area lists the following rules, the breach of which will lead to exclusion from the site (cited in Youth Action and Policy Association, 1997: 50):

- visiting the galleria without shirt or shoes
- standing, walking, sitting or congregating in such a way as to cause inconvenience to others
- possession or consumption of illegal substances
- disorderly or disruptive conduct of any nature, including using obscene language/gestures/clothing, running, yelling, fighting, throwing any object, littering, making excessive noise, or anything that may be offensive to others
- possession of pets - except Leader Dogs
- smoking in the common areas
- distributing literature, offering any items for sale, soliciting signatures, conducting surveys, videotaping or photographing without written centre management approval
- any act that could result in physical harm to person or damage to property
- truancy
- skateboarding, rollerblading, or bicycling
- acts prohibited by federal/state/local law
- non-dining use of the atrium food court tables

The clear message here is that the purpose of using the centre is one of consumption, and even then only that which is on offer within the centre itself. Leaving aside for the moment the social nature of shopping centres, and the multiple social uses of space within them, it is sufficient to note simply that much of the policing of commercial public spaces is undertaken by private police. In many cases private security firms and guards work closely in tandem with state police in regulating privately owned spaces. The situation is rendered even more complex when the responsibility for security in publicly owned spaces is given over to private security firms (as with SouthGate in Melbourne). A number of important questions can be asked, therefore, regarding the precise relationship between private and public policing, and issues of accountability, powers and rights (see Blagg & Wilkie, 1995).

Due to their physical layout and construction, city sites such as shopping complexes and recreational and entertainment centres are more amenable to the adoption of highly intensive systems of surveillance and control. The use of security guards and closed-circuit cameras,

for example, is not uncommon. Furthermore, there are instances where private companies and corporations are being granted extraordinary powers to police users of their privately owned but publicly accessible urban spaces. In 1994, for example, the Queensland Government introduced the Southbank Corporation Amendment By-Law (No.1) 1994, which provides power for security officers to stop people, ask for their name and address, and direct them to leave the site (Murray, 1995). The Act was amended in December 1995 to enable security officers to unilaterally ban people with written notice from returning to the site for up to 10 days if the person disobeys a direction, is drunk or disorderly, or even if they simply consider the ban is 'justified in the circumstances'. They can also apply to the court to ban them for up to one year. It is important to note here, that not only does the law give the private police greater powers of exclusion than that available to state police, but it is available to security officers regardless of training or attitudes to young people.

The relationship between private security guards and young people has some parallels with that of the relationship between the police and young people. A recent study (White, Aumain, McDonnell & Harris, 1997) for example, found that many young people who had had bad experiences with security guards complained of constant harassment, being under surveillance and being told to move on. What many young people felt was a sense of unfairness in terms of how the guards responded to them - particularly because of their age. More generally, it is often assumed that young people are simply hanging around and that they necessarily have a negative impact on retail investment and management. Yet, as Queensland research demonstrates (see Heywood, Crane, Egginton & Gleeson, 1998) the spending impact of young people in shopping centres is not inconsiderable, and they have significant influence on parental spending choices.

On the other hand, young people do have positive experiences with security guards as well (and likewise with police). This was seen, for example, in the findings presented in relation to the rural young people who were interviewed for a major national study (White, 1998a). Similarly, young people in a Melbourne study (White et.al, 1997: 122) described how they were friends with some security guards, and how they had been helped or protected by them. Having a 'positive experience' was also interpreted as simply being treated well when being hassled by the security guard to move on.

## **Urban Planning & Crime Prevention**

In simple terms, crime prevention can be defined as trying to address crime problems at their source, rather than waiting for offenders to reach the criminal justice system. It is an attempt to stop crime or anti-social behaviour before it occurs.

A number of diverse causes or factors have been identified as underlying criminal and anti-social behaviour and activity (O'Malley & Sutton, 1997; Sutton, 1994; Sutton & Hazlehurst, 1996). The causes of crime are complex - involving a wide range of immediate and longer term social factors. Some of these relate to family violence and neglect, difficulties in school, poor housing, peer pressure and blocked social opportunities. Others relate to specific environmental conditions which lead to greater likelihood of the commission of certain types of crimes, such as doors left un-locked, the presence of darkened alleyways and merchandise left unattended at the front of a shop.

Generally speaking, the literature on crime prevention can be broken down into two broad categories: those which focus on social crime prevention, and those which stress opportunity reduction measures (Sutton & Hazlehurst, 1996).

(i) *Social Crime Prevention*

Social crime prevention approaches are usually centred on the underlying causes of crime, which are seen as stemming from economic circumstances (e.g., unemployment), social inequality (e.g., poverty) and cultural disadvantage (e.g., racism and ethnic difference). They include strategies such as:

- media and publicity campaigns (e.g., anti-violence)
- agency activities (e.g., school-based programmes)
- diversionary measures (e.g., for 'at risk' groups)
- community development (e.g., local job programmes)
- developmental strategies (e.g., early childhood services)

The assumptions of social development approaches are that crime and anti-social behaviour are intrinsically tied to social conditions, patterns of group behaviour, changing values, and family, school and work dynamics. Hence, social development initiatives encompass a wide range of programmes involving work with families, schools, sport and leisure organisations, welfare bodies and local community groups.

The emphasis in this form of crime prevention is on maximising the health and well-being of all members of a community, and enhancing their opportunities to partake in community life as fully as possible. Citizen participation is encouraged, as is the role of the community as a whole in crime prevention efforts.

(ii) *Opportunity Reduction Approaches*

Opportunity reduction approaches tend to concentrate on reducing the situational, physical or environmental opportunities for crime. The main strategies employed here include:

- planning and design measures (e.g., creating defensible spaces)
- focussed or situational strategies (e.g., graffiti reduction measures)
- use or threat of coercion to deter offenders (e.g., targeted policing)

The assumptions of these approaches to crime prevention is that crime is generally a matter of choice and opportunity - the solution therefore is to make the choices more costly in personal terms, and to reduce as far as possible the opportunities for crime or anti-social behaviour.

There are two broad schools of crime prevention which are associated with these latter types of approaches. The first is 'crime prevention through environmental design', which examines ways in which the physical environment can be changed through design, planning and architectural means so as to make houses, neighbourhoods and cities safer (see Geason & Wilson, 1989). The second is 'situational prevention', which is aimed at resolving problems in identified locations or 'crime hot spots'. This often involves some modification to a local physical environment, as well as active intervention strategies on the part of shopkeepers, law enforcement officials and other members of the community (see Clarke, 1992; Felson, 1992).

The social prevention approaches, and opportunity reduction approaches, are not mutually exclusive. The ideal crime prevention strategy in fact is one which incorporates elements from each broad strand. Issues relating specifically to urban planning, use of public space and crime can be addressed through what can be called an *accommodating approach to crime prevention* (White, 1998b). The key concept of the accommodating approach is that of negotiation. The approach is premised on the idea that there may be diverse and competing perspectives regarding how certain publicly accessible resources are or ought to be used. Recognition of the specific needs and desires of different parties is then linked to the importance of public participation in any decisions which affect the concerned parties. From a crime prevention perspective, the accommodating approach attempts to use participatory methods as a means to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime in particular settings and locales.

The primary institutions involved in these kinds of approaches are shopping centre managers, developers, commercial sport and recreational outlets, retailers, and local councils. Business proprietors, youth and community workers, architects, social planners and town planners are the central players, with police, welfare and justice officials also having advisory and minor intervention roles (usually oriented toward supporting any rules of behaviour and diversionary procedures which may be negotiated between the parties).

The main method of the accommodating approach is that of direct interaction between interested parties. Young people, to take one example, are considered as legitimate 'stakeholders' who ideally should have a say in any consultative process. Similar to the broad social development approach, much consideration is given to problem-solving and to multi-agency collaboration. Importantly, the approach is based on the idea that people (of all ages and social backgrounds) do have legitimate concerns, particularly over how they are treated in public spaces such as shopping centres and the street, and that they should be involved in negotiating outcomes which are beneficial to all parties in some way. Rather than attempting to exclude certain people - as users of certain public spaces, as active participants in community life, as rights-holders - this approach is based on the notion of social inclusion. In some instances, the approach may also be directly linked in to developmental strategies insofar as provision of, for example, youth services and youth-friendly spaces can be an outcome of the negotiation process.

In practice, the accommodating approach incorporates a number of different dimensions involving planning and design issues, management issues and social development issues (White, 1998a; Bell, 1991; Clarke, 1992; Trench, Taner & Tiesdell, 1992). For example, in specific commercial districts various considerations would need to be taken into account.

(i) *Planning and Design*

The literature on crime prevention has identified a number of ideas which have achieved widespread support as a means to making cities safer. Some of these include:

- provide well-lit, well-used corridors of activity which feel safer
- locate bus stops near places of activity for better surveillance
- encourage evening hail-and-ride bus services

- provide parking for women on the ground level of multi-storey car parks and have them supervised
- improve sign posting in the city centre clearing showing the activity zones
- use of vandal-proof materials, and the speedy repair and replacement of damaged items
- setting of taller shrubs back from paths and buildings

(ii) *Management Issues*

An important element of crime prevention, especially in relation to specific city sites, concerns the management of people within these sites. The approaches which appear to have the greatest positive impact are those which include:

- an emphasis on community participation and involvement in identifying problems
- the formation of community consultative teams to oversee action strategies and regulatory schemes designed to make communities safer
- multi-agency involvement, with a clear sense of purpose
- wide involvement of diverse groups of people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of specific crime prevention strategies

(iii) *Social Development Issues*

Given that the causes of crime and anti-social are complex and diverse, it is essential to consider the social context of any programme designed to minimise harmful behaviour and criminal activity. This requires consideration of the following types of concerns:

- careful assessment of local needs, and specifically the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups within the local community
- targeting of priority groups and individuals 'at risk', as well as general community development activities
- implementation of action plans by qualified youth and community workers with the skills to build relationships of trust with people
- development of cross-cultural, as well as cross-institutional, strategies involving people from different institutions and community backgrounds

Whatever the specific measures adopted, this approach requires some form of integrated strategy which ensures that the various techniques work well in conjunction with each other.

## **Examples of Innovative Practice**

There are several examples of an accommodating crime prevention approach, drawn from the USA, Australia and the Netherlands, which deal specifically with malls and commercial street areas.

(i) *Planning Processes*

In the American city of Santa Monica in the state of California the local council was concerned to revitalise an old, run-down mall which was perceived to be blighted and unsafe (Sandercock, 1997). The mall was re-designed in such a way as to encourage the different

types of activity that take place along the mall, from shopping to strolling, to sitting and meeting, to parades and community celebrations. Ample space was allowed for public seating, trees and banners made for a visually interesting environment, footpath cafes were encouraged as well as street performers, and people from all social backgrounds and use interests are encouraged to congregate in the mall. The public space was planned and designed from the start as a 'community space' - open and accessible to all and sundry. As Sandercock (1997: 32) describes it:

The designers were briefed by smart city planners who knew what they needed to complement rather than compete with the existing indoor mall. And, the planners were as concerned about creating a public place as they were about creating retail and office space. In turn, those planners are responsive and responsible to a City Council which made certain key policy choices: the decision to revive this deteriorating streetscape by investing public money; the decision to police this public place in a low-key way that signals tolerance and inclusion rather than exclusivity; the decision to encourage street performers without controlling them; the decision not to hassle the homeless and the panhandlers, which is a decision not to sanitise the space by excluding those whose presence may make some people uncomfortable; and the decision to go for a mix of activities and uses, a 'something for everyone' approach that encourages heterogeneity in age, race, and income.

The emphasis, therefore, was on a mix of activities, low-level and tolerant police presence, encouragement of street performers (they do not have to audition), and improvement in the general streetscape. The result: a convivial atmosphere which is socially inclusive, and very little street crime.

#### *(ii) Management Protocols*

In Australia, the Brisbane City Council undertook a major project designed to improve relationships and safety in major centres, including shopping centres and malls (Heywood, Crane, Egginton & Gleeson, 1998). As part of the recommended courses of action, attention was directed at management practices within centres, including security arrangements. It was recommended that centres develop clear, fair and non-discriminatory rules which apply to all users. Protocols are to be developed to deal with a variety of problems, as experienced by various stakeholders, including centre management, shop owners and young people themselves. Such protocols are to provide for the involvement of youth services in responding to the needs of young people. They are to provide substantial guidance for managers, police, security, youth services and young people in dealing with difficulties.

Guidelines for Centre security provision in relation to young people, and security personnel training, are intended to be consistent with a 'customer service' approach and a 'crisis response' approach depending on the circumstances. Issues of communication, accountability, problem-solving, appropriate types of security and so on are central. As a general prescription, the following recommendation captures the essence of how improvements might be undertaken (Heywood et.al., 1997: 143):

Centre users, including young people, should have access to and information on avenues to raise concerns or make complaints about specific instances of security intervention or general matters relating to security provision in the Centre. This should be by way of:

(a) a grievance procedure that is specified in the Security Policy and which young people using the centre are informed about through appropriate mechanisms. This procedure should allow young people to utilise an advocate or support person in making known and progressing their grievance;

(b) a procedure, specified in the Security Policy, for general concerns about security policies or practices to be raised on an as needs basis with the Security Manager. Centre youth and community committees or liaison strategies are one option for referral of issues for feedback or input;

(c) a strategy, specified in the Security Policy, for periodic review of centre security policies and practices. Such a strategy should provide clear opportunity for feedback by the full range of centre users, including young people, regarding particular incidents or broader issues to do with security provision in the centre. This strategy should have a focus on improving how the centre is experienced by a diversity of users, including young people, rather than on attributing blame to individuals, be they young people, security providers, or management. A centre youth and community committee could play an important role in such a review.

The impetus for significant alteration of existing security practices very much depends upon management support for such reform. In part, this depends upon whether or not shopping centre managers recognise the commercial benefits of having inclusionary policies vis-a-vis those who visit the site.

### *(iii) Participation & Service Provision*

In the Dutch city of Rotterdam there were serious forms of youth crime and vandalism at the Zuidplein shopping centre (Hoefnagels, 1997). Attempts to deal with this by applying harsher, repressive measures only led to further problems with the young people. A broad based community committee was set up to address the issues. The main outcomes included the adoption of 'rules of conduct' for the centre, which were conveyed to the young people of the district by the police through the local school. Secondly, a street youth worker was appointed, who was financed for 75% by the city, and for 25% by the employers' association. The youth worker operated independently from the police, the courts and the shop owners. Two so called 'tolerance' locations were established at the shopping centre, and the youth worker organised support and activities for the young people who used the centre. When problems arose, the worker discussed them directly with the people involved, leading to greater communication between the shopkeepers and the young people. As a consequence of these measures, both vandalism and shopstealing declined in appreciable terms.

In the American city of Berkeley, California, several weekends of violence led the city to deploy large numbers of police officers into the Telegraph Avenue area (Noguera, 1996). However, a massive police presence not only cost the city more than it could afford, but it resulted in the scaring away of many of the tourists and customers who frequented the restaurants and shops in the area. A community task force was created, involving young people as well. As a consequence of discussions, a group was formed comprised of young people from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. The task of the group was to help provide security in the area in a non-threatening, non-confrontational manner. It provided a youth escort service and monitoring patrol, and aimed to mediate conflict and promote safety.

In addition to the creation of this group, measures were taken to expand the range of options for youth in the area, including for example, midnight basketball and supervised weekend parties at venues throughout the community. Crime diminished substantially in the area. Part of the success of the intervention was that young people who used the street for socialising felt that they received respect, not harassment, from the patrol group - their peers.

These examples provide concrete indications of practical measures which can be adopted which provide relatively low cost, but effective, ways in which to reduce both the fear of crime, and crime itself. A crime prevention programme based on this approach would need to take into account aspects of the physical environment, and the social dynamics of public life within this environment. This would entail mapping out the physical lay-out and design of a specific site; a social mapping exercise taken in order to discern the different groups which use a site or amenity, and the multiple uses of specific public areas; and consideration given to how best regulate specific environments in ways which enhance feelings of safety, without unnecessarily excluding any members of a local community from participating in public life.

## **Strategic Planning Processes**

The doing of crime prevention as part of the planning process entails not only gaining knowledge about relevant developments here and overseas. It also requires study of local conditions and local factors which may influence specific project development. A crime prevention audit would need to take into account aspects of the physical environment, and the social dynamics of public life within this environment.

### *(i) Physical Design*

This basically entails a mapping out of the physical lay-out and design of the area in question. Such a mapping exercise needs to take into account the character of specific sites, and the potential there might be for unsafe situations (Planning Collaborative (Vic) Ltd, 1993).

#### *(a) identification of sites*

- attractors (e.g., hotels, car parks, discos)
- waiting locations (e.g., bus stops, train station)
- movement routes (e.g., entertainment, food)

#### *(b) dealing with unsafe situations*

- building design (e.g., darkened shop front entry, car parks)
- civic design (e.g., use of plants, lighting)

In general, the evaluation and audit of existing and proposed sites should lead to the incorporation of specific design elements. Some of these might include (Bell, 1991):

- identifying safe routes, and locating after-hours activities (such as cafes) along these routes
- elimination of short-cutting through certain areas, especially via laneways which have no surveillance

- providing clear visual, functional or symbolic cues to appropriate use of specific public spaces
- ensuring there are clear sightlines vis-a-vis safe routes and transport stops, to allow for passive surveillance

(ii) *Social Environment*

This basically requires a form of social mapping, in order to discern the different groups which use a site or amenity, and the multiple uses of specific public areas (White, Murray & Robbins, 1996).

(a) identification of users

- owners and managers
- security personnel and authority figures (e.g., police, private security guards)
- specific groups (e.g., young people, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds)

(b) identification of uses

- commercial purposes (e.g., buying and selling)
- recreational purposes (e.g., commercial leisure)
- social purposes (e.g., congregating, hanging out)
- movement purposes (e.g., transport access)
- work purposes (e.g., place of work)

In general, the social audit process ought to take into account the diversity of populations using the amenity, and the wide range of uses of the public areas. Specific issues here include:

- consideration of the tensions between commercial interests and community activities
- audit of facilities and spaces in relation to the specific needs of diverse user groups
- different perceptions within the community regarding safety and security
- inclusion of different groups in the consultation process, and on an ongoing basis
- encouragement of dialogue between apparently competing interest groups

iii. *Regulatory Environment*

Good practice in crime prevention is essentially about how best to regulate specific environments in ways which enhance feelings of safety, without unnecessarily excluding any members of a local community from participating in public life. For this to occur, it is necessary to evaluate existing regulatory mechanisms and practices, from the point of view of broad approach and specific expertise required.

(a) regulatory approach

- based upon widespread community consultation
- involves direct communication with diverse user groups

- adoption of attitude of conciliation and respect for dignity of the other
- willingness to be held accountable for actions

(b) professional orientation

- type and extent of formal training, including dispute resolution techniques
- active incorporation of indigenous people, ethnic minority people and women into particular services and roles
- adoption of problem-solving approaches which deal with underlying issues of conflict
- development of specific protocols regarding how best to deal with certain circumstances, events and groups of users

In general, the creation of a positive regulatory environment rests upon active consultation and incorporation of community members into the decision-making process. This requires consideration of a range of substantive concerns:

- development of a policy framework in local government strategic plans, and mall management strategies, which acknowledges diverse needs and interests
- incorporation of specific community concerns in urban planning regulations, through for example social impact assessments
- employment of youth advocates by local government to assist in the consultation and representation process
- use of wide variety of techniques and mechanisms to suit the particular needs of diverse user groups
- public documentation of consultation, negotiation and decision-making processes

## Conclusion

It is necessary to develop a certain cultural climate and material infrastructure if crime prevention is to be effective. In particular, good practice in crime prevention requires:

- knowledge of the local area, and local community needs, issues and services
- acknowledgement of diverse approaches to crime prevention and choosing what is suitable for a specific area or to deal with a specific problem
- co-ordination of various groups, agencies and individuals around crime prevention objectives
- ongoing community forums for the discussion and assessment of local issues surrounding crime and anti-social behaviour
- development of protocols and procedures in dealing with aspects of social development and opportunity reduction strategies
- training and education of appropriate personnel in crime prevention methods, perspectives and specific intervention tactics
- on-going evaluation of crime prevention initiatives and strategies

Crime prevention is about reducing the extent of crime and anti-social behaviour. It is not, however, possible to eliminate crime. It is important, therefore, to be aware of both the limits

of crime prevention in general, and the limitations of specific measures in particular. Theoretically, it is possible to prevent all crime in a particular area. However, a fixation on dealing with a perceived 'crime problem' can lead to adoption of overly repressive measures and indeed generate further fear of crime. This can be counter-productive for everyone concerned.

Consider the following example. Public spaces such as malls and 'nightlife' streets are attractive in the first instance precisely because of the unstructured, unorganised nature of the space. Part of the attraction in fact is that certain public spaces are exciting and interesting, and this may occasionally include misbehaviour or incivility in such spaces. The over-regulation of public spaces can put people off in much the same way that a lack of appropriate social regulation can make people reticent to visit some places.

Thus, crime prevention is always something of a trade-off. It involves making decisions about the extent to which we prioritise preventing crime, in relation to other kinds of social objectives, such as ensuring that people have access to public spaces and public events which they wish to attend because they hold the promise of something out of the ordinary. This could consist of simply having the chance to look at a wide variety of people, with varying types of clothes and appearance, and engaging of a diverse range of activities and behaviours.

Effective and appropriate crime prevention therefore requires a thorough analysis of local crime problems (and perceptions of these), their related physical and social environments, and a sensitivity towards the concerns, priorities and rights of the many people likely to be affected by adoption of particular measures.

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