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# The 'Art and Science' of Preparing Crime Risk Assessment Reports<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Much has been made of the impact of neo-liberalism on crime control and prevention in recent decades. The privatisation of corrections, security and other criminal justice functions has been the focus of considerable commentary. One feature of this debate that has received little attention has been the work of private consultants. Interviews with a small number of private consultants engaged (amongst other things) in the preparation of crime risk assessment reports in New South Wales (Australia) shed some light on this dimension of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) practice in NSW. In particular, analysis of interview transcripts revealed the striking similarity of approaches to compiling a crime risk assessment, the challenges of maintaining independence and quantifying crime risks, the lack of consistency of councils (local government) to review crime risks of proposed developments, and the need for research and professional development.

## Keywords

Consultants, crime risk assessments, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), development applications.

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## Introduction

Various commentators have highlighted the rise of private entities operating within or on the periphery of the criminal justice system and crime control and prevention domains (Sarre 1994; Christie 1994; Crawford 1998; Garland 2001). In making predictions about the future of crime control, Sarre (1994) noted the potential for the 'privatisation of crime prevention', while Crawford (1998) highlighted the different forms that the 'privatisation of crime control' could take, including the use of markets and the contracting out of service delivery. Garland (2001) described the 'commercialisation of justice' with its attendant 'fateful consequences' that could set up 'new interests and incentives' for private operators.

These developments have by some been linked to the impact of neo-liberalism and the valorisation of the market (Lee 2007; O'Malley 2008). Lee (2007) argues that 'neo-liberal rationalities, leaner government and governing-at-a-distance, brings with it the desire for private sector involvement in many areas of social life, including crime prevention' (2007: 171). In such an environment, services previously provided by the state are devolved to the private sector. This is often referred to as the retreat of the state. No longer does the state (if it ever did) have a monopoly over criminal justice, crime control and prevention activities. Wacquant goes further suggesting this rolling back of the state is more instrumental and is accompanied by something far more insidious. He suggests that:

...the punitive containment of urban marginality through the simultaneous rolling back of the social safety net and the rolling out of the police- and-prison dragnet and their knitting together into a carceral-assistential lattice is not the spawn of some broad societal trend—whether it be the ascent of “biopower” or the advent of “late modernity”—but, at bottom, an exercise in state crafting (2010: 210).

It follows then that much analysis of this rise in the 'privatisation of crime control', adopting Crawford's phrase, has mostly focused on private prisons (see Harding 1997; Moyle 2000; Selmon and Leighton 2010; Grimwood 2014, amongst others) and private police or security industries and providers (see Wood and Shearing 2007; Prenzler, Earle and Sarre 2009; Zedner 2009; Fischer, Halibozek and Walters 2013, among others ). These areas have necessarily attracted considerable attention given the significant conceptual shift in these services moving from state-owned (or predominantly state-owned) and operated to being commodities traded in the market. As scholars have suggested, there is evidence that the punitive turn discussed by Wacquant has also been accompanied by a preventative turn (Hughes 2007). It is however arguable as to whether the expansion of private actors into the crime prevention field is either a function of neo-liberalism or the punitive turn. It may actually be more accurate to suggest that private actors in areas such as CPTED as discussed in the article constitute a governmentalisation of a hitherto relatively ungoverned sphere of criminal justice – albeit that this governance is conducted at a distance.

Thus, often passed off as the by-products of the neo-liberal forces discussed above, little attention has been given to the rise of private consultants operating in the crime prevention sphere. Indeed, This is lamentable, as we currently have very little understanding of the types of skills such consultants bring to their practice, nor how such practices align (or not) with the 'steering' mechanisms of government that envisage specific types of practices and outcomes.

Another way of conceptualising the work of these private consultants is to understand their work as an extension to the way evaluations of risk have entered into increasing components of life and governance in late modern society (Beck 1992). We have outlined elsewhere (Lee et al 2013) the ways in which risk instruments such as CPTED evaluations in new developments can fulfil this appetite for risk assessment, without necessarily being undertaken in ways that have any effect on the outcome of the development. That is that there is often a reduction of risk assessments to inputs and outputs or a 'black boxing' (Latour 1993). That said, following O'Malley (2010), risk evaluation holds an 'uncertain' promise. Risk is not necessarily aligned with neo-liberal governmental strategies. Like O'Malley's evaluation of risk discourse more generally, we believe there is a productive capacity to the implementation of crime risk assessments in new developments. However, from a normative perspective there is little assessment of the ways in which private consultants manage and undertake this risk evaluation work. In an attempt to partially fill this gap and to augment the extant commentary, a modest research project was undertaken to explore the role of private consultants preparing crime risk assessment reports in New South Wales (NSW), Australia.

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. These guidelines were intended to 'help councils [local government authorities] identify crime risk and minimize opportunities for crime through the appropriate assessment of development proposals' (DUAP 2001, p. 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, p. 2). Where a development presents a crime risk, the 'guidelines can be used to justify':

- 'Modification of the development to minimize the risk of crime; or
- Refusal of the development on the grounds that crime risk cannot be appropriately minimized' (DUAP 2001, p. 2).

The guidelines contain two parts: Part A describes a crime risk assessment (one page), while Part B outlines key CPTED principles (two pages) which should be considered by councils when assessing all developments (Part B will not be considered here as it is superfluous to this article).

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, p. 3). The guidelines then state that there are two key steps when assessing crime risk: (1) 'obtain an understanding of the crime risk of the area, and if required (2) apply (CPTED) treatments that correspond with levels of risk present in the area' (DUAP 2001, p. 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, p. 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, p. 2).

It is unclear from the Guidelines who would develop these crime risk assessments. However, since the introduction of the Guidelines, a significant amount of this work has fallen to the private sector. This is perhaps unsurprising given the long established involvement of private consultants and companies in built environment and urban planning activities (see [Kagi, 1969](#)).

Through interviewing consultants responsible for the preparation of crime risk assessment reports in NSW, Australia, it has been possible to develop a better understanding of this work, especially following the introduction of the S79c Guidelines which have created or enabled the development of a market for these reports.

## Research Methodology

The data for this article were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with seven key informants representing six consultancy firms from across the state of NSW. Two respondents were from the same company and were interviewed together at their request. This project initially attempted to employ a random sampling procedure to identify participants for this study in order to maximize the generalizability of any observations to the state of NSW (Kalton, 1983). Following the designation of a development as a ‘major project’ under section 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, 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 this website between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2012, the initial sampling frame comprised 1,334 development application from across NSW.

Seeking to identify 10 viable participants, reports were randomly selected using a random number generator until 10 reports were identified that contained a crime risk assessment that had been completed by a unique consultancy firm. Out of these 10 companies that were initially identified via this method, two consented to participate in the study, two potential participants declined to participate, and the final six did not respond to the invitation. In the second round of random selections, a further eight reports were identified using the same random selection procedure. None of these additional eight companies responded to the invitation to participate in this study. Based on the 331 random selections that were made from the sampling frame, 22 (6.7%) contained crime risk assessments that were completed by consultants (four companies had completed multiple assessments that were selected).

In order to expand the sample, a purposive criterion sampling technique was then used (Neuman, 2006) in the attempt to reach the original ideal sample size of 10. Potential respondents were identified through an internet keyword search using the following terms: ‘crime prevention consultant’, ‘CPTED reports’ and ‘crime risk assessment reports’. This method yielded a further eight consultancy companies that had completed crime risk assessments during the time period specified by this study. Of these eight, four of these companies consented to participate and were included in the final sample for this project. Following the exhaustion of these identified consultants, a final wave of purposive criterion sampling was conducted that sought to provide a final four participants for this study. This final wave yielded no additional consenting respondents.

Five of the interviews were recorded digitally and were professionally transcribed verbatim. One interviewee declined to have the interview recorded due to privacy concerns. For the interviewee who declined to be recorded, hand written notes were compiled during the interview that aimed to preserve the respondent’s original comments as accurately as possible. In order to accommodate the busy schedules of the participants, all potential interviews were able to select the venue where the interview took place. Two interviews were conducted at the office of the interviewees, one was conducted at the University of Sydney, and three were conducted over the telephone. All interviewees completed consent forms that had been approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee of the University of Sydney.

## Interviewees

Before discussing the key findings arising from the interviews with the consultants, it is beneficial to provide some descriptive context.

The backgrounds of each interviewee were varied and diverse. Two had qualifications in social planning, another in urban planning, while the remaining interviewees had a mixture of experience and qualifications in policing, security, risk management and criminal justice. These diverse backgrounds highlight the different perspectives brought to bear on crime risk assessment work – for some, this work fits with social and urban planning practices, while for others, it is more of an adjunct to other specifically crime prevention-related or security risk assessment based work.

Three stated that they had completed the Safer By Design (SBD) training course developed and delivered by the NSW Police Force. This four-day course has been the main training program offered in NSW since the introduction of the S79c Guidelines in April 2001. Four interviewees stated that they had not completed this training, with one mentioning that his attempt to enrol in the course had been prevented by the NSW Police Force because he was a private consultant. Police or council employees are the main targets of this training.

The interviewees were asked how many crime risk assessment reports that they had compiled. This was not easily answered as crime risk assessment reports might be built into various planning documents and an accurate memory of reports completed over a period of 13 years (since the S79c Guidelines were introduced) also limits the accuracy of any estimates. Nonetheless, the following provides a basis for assessing how experienced each interviewee is in this area:

Table 1: Number of Crime Risk Assessment Reports prepared by Interviewees

Interviewee	Number of Crime Risk Assessments
#1 (this interview was with two consultants working for the same company) <sup>5</sup>	300+ (combined)
#2	Four
#3	200+
#4	25-30
#5	6 (stand-alone reports) and 120 (as part of Statement of Environmental

<sup>5</sup> Given that the first interview was conducted with two consultants from the same company, any reference to Interviewee #01 in this article refers to comments made by either of these interviewees.

	Effects <sup>6</sup> )
#6	40-50

Clearly, the level of involvement in this work varies significantly across the interviewees. However, the majority have extensive experience in this area of work, having compiled (in some cases) hundreds of crime risk assessment reports. It was stated that these reports have been developed for diverse developments including schools, public spaces, entertainment precincts, registered clubs, shopping centres, health facilities, residential complexes, commercial and industrial sites, mixed-used developments, and retirement villages. This gives some insight into the varied nature of the sites covered by the crime risk assessment reports.

## Findings

A number of findings emerged from the interviews with the consultants. Those covered here will focus on the processes involved in developing a crime risk assessment report, the challenges of maintaining independence and quantifying crime risks, the lack of consistency of councils to review crime risks of proposed developments, and the need for research and professional development.

### Preparing a Crime Risk Assessment Report

Each interviewee was asked to discuss the processes adopted in the development of a crime risk assessment. Despite the potential differences according to the size and function of the proposed development, there was considerable symmetry in the reported processes adopted by each of the interviewees in developing crime risk assessment reports. The following outlines the key features mentioned (in differing degrees and in different sequences) by all interviewees. Note that this is not a sequential list of procedures. The order that they were listed varied slightly across the interviewees, which might be a function of different consultants following a different sequence of procedures or is a reflection of recollection and memory biases.

### Talk to the Client

Various personnel involved in a project might engage a consultant to prepare a crime risk assessment report. Irrespective of whom this might be (i.e. architect, developer, project manager), an initial conversation is the first step in developing a crime risk assessment report. This conversation serves to gain an understanding of the project scope and the nature of the proposed development. For interviewee #06, this initial client contact is critical to determining if they accept a project. Interviewee #06 uses it as an opportunity to learn about the client and to determine if they will be amenable to making changes should crime risks be identified. Respondent #06 suggested that they would reject a project offer if the client appeared from the outset to be unwilling to modify their development to reduce crime risks (not all interviewees discussed this issue, so it is not possible to determine if there was unique to interviewee #06).

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<sup>6</sup> A Statement of Environmental Effects 'is the record of the environmental assessment, which necessitates a process of identifying and discussing the planning and environmental information relevant to the site or proposal' ([http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Portals/0/planning\\_reforms/pdf/Part%204-%20B%20-%20070809.pdf](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Portals/0/planning_reforms/pdf/Part%204-%20B%20-%20070809.pdf) – accessed 12 November 2014). This documentation requires less detail about crime and safety issues compared with a crime risk assessment report.

This initial conversation also assists in establishing baseline information. The nature and type of the proposed development, current usage of the site, and initial plans might be captured during these initial discussions.

### *Site Audit*

All interviewees discussed the purpose of site visits:

We'll then do an examination on site. It tends to flow along the lines of a review of plans, a physical site inspection which generally is only a daylight inspection. If there are issues around evening, night time operations, we'll also do a site inspection of that. We identify the potential threats and issues ... (Interviewee #03).

Some specifically highlighted the importance of site visits during the night, especially for sites with late night functions:

I prefer doing two site inspections, so one during the day, one during the night. Obviously you get a very different context between day time and night time. What can be perceived as safe in the day time can be very different at night time, so looking at kind of wider area characteristics such as pedestrian movements, lighting, any overlooking of the area from surrounding developments, things like that (Interviewee #05).

Thus site visits provide an understanding of the context of the proposed development, pedestrian movements in the area and other local area dynamics relevant to assessing crime risks.

### *Analyse Data*

Analysis of crime and demographic data was identified as a critical part of building an understanding of the site and its surroundings. The nature of the data accessed and techniques used for analysis were generally not described in detail in the interviews. However, there was considerable focus given to the importance of analysing crime data and interviewees generally reported accessing freely available crime data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) website, which is the agency responsible for compiling crime data in NSW.

The following provides an example of the purpose of interrogating crime data:

Identifying the main areas of crime, whether they're crimes against person, property, whatever it may be, and also long term trends. So I try and look at the stats not just for the most recent stats but the past five, ten years to get an idea of the general trend in crime statistics for the area, whether something is increasing or decreasing, and what this might potentially mean into the future ... (Interviewee #05).

While crime data is analysed to provide an understanding of crime trends that might impact on the proposed development, a number of problems were identified with access to and the utility of crime data. Some of the issues raised related to the currency of the data and the geographical context.

There's always a delay in the data that BOCSAR release, so you can't get an immediate picture of what's happened in the last few months, particularly with mapping information and mapping data I think is a wonderful resource (Interviewee #02).



It [i.e. the crime data] tends to be unfortunately just local government area which is why I also, where possible, have a chat with the local police to get more area specific data (Interviewee #05).

As highlighted above, there are perceived limitations of the crime data, especially when being used to consider crime risks for a proposed development which might only cover a small parcel of land. Crime data for a local government area (LGA) will be unhelpful in this context (as has been discussed elsewhere – see Clancey 2011). One way of minimising these limitations is to purchase crime data from the NSW BOCSAR. Data can be provided for smaller geographical areas. Interviewee #06 discussed routinely purchasing data to assist in crime risk assessments and claimed that requests were generally processed in a couple of days. However, Interviewee #02 (see below) suggested that it takes ten days to get a data request completed, which has implications for completing the crime risk assessment in a timely manner (an issue that will be considered in more detail later):

And so, yeah, BOCSAR data takes 10 days to get. So the very first thing we would do if we needed information was to send out the data requests (Interviewee: #02).

### *Assess Architectural Plans*

Assessing architectural plans forms the cornerstone of the crime risk assessment process. While the exact processes adopted to analyse architectural plans were not discussed in detail, it became apparent that two methodologies were broadly highlighted by the interviewees. The first involves the use of the 100 item checklist developed by the NSW Police Force, while the second is a less proscriptive general analysis of crime risks. Each will be discussed here.

Three interviewees reported that they had completed the New South Wales Police Force's SBD training course. As part of this four-day training course, participants are introduced to a 100 item audit checklist. Those interviewees who had completed the SBD course reported that they utilised this checklist to assess architectural plans and the proposed site more broadly. The 100 item checklist requires the assessor to rate as either good, deficient or not applicable various dimensions of surveillance, lighting, territorial reinforcement, environmental maintenance, activity and space management, access control and design, definition and designation of the site. The number of items scored as good/deficient/not applicable are tallied and then used to derive a project risk rating.

The following illustrates how this checklist is employed by consultants to assess the architectural plans:

... we review the plans and work through the companion guide really and the checklist and the risk assessment checklist that was provided at the Safer by Design course and go through and look at the plans and make an assessment drawing from those principles plus if there's anything that stands out that you just make your own judgment. But that's quite a good overarching view of everything that you should consider (Interviewee #04).

... then work through the checklist. From that use a matrix to essentially establish the level of risk and make any recommendations that could see the improvement and safety for either residents or people using the area or whoever it might be (Interviewee#05).

Another who had completed the SBD training course commented that 'the [SBD] training manual has been really useful in preparing proposals and things' (Interviewee #02).

While it is clear that the training and the associated documentation has helped these interviewees assess architectural plans for crime risks, some concerns were raised:

It's a very strong starting point [the checklist] but it is just a guideline and sometimes there are proposals that just fall outside the scope of it. There's a unique site characteristic or there's an element of the design that gives rise to serious concern or provides serious benefits that just isn't really covered by the checklist, and that needs to be further addressed within the report (Interviewee #05).

Perhaps more significantly, Interviewee #05 also highlighted the problems with the checklist and the associated weighting of individual items:

Because it's just based on number of yes, number of no, number of N/A, there's no kind of weighting given to any particular elements, which I think is a bit of a negative. I mean some of the characteristics covered in that matrix and the checklist, I should say, they're really not as important as other elements, but because of the way the matrix is set up they're given equal weighting which doesn't really work the best, but unfortunately a lot of that is very subjective rather than objective and I'm not certain how you would go about providing a weighting for each of the particular answers that may be the best way forward (Interviewee #5).

These concerns highlight a broader concern, previously raised by [Sutton et al \(2008\)](#) which relates to the objective measurement of risk:

So it's like anything to do with risk, whether it's in the corporate environment or wherever else, it's the perennial issue for people in the risk management field, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate the benefits and certainly more difficult to even quantify them (Interviewee #03).

In contrast to the more regimented approach taken by respondents using the SBD checklist, the other interviewees described approaches that reflected their professional experience. In describing the approach to assessing architectural plans, both interviewees in the first interview highlighted the importance of understanding the overall development, the perspectives of the different built environment professionals contributing to the proposed development and the need to focus on the management of the site beyond construction (which is what they referred to as Crime Prevention through Environmental Management or CPTEM):

Well, we sit down with the project team, we have the drawings ... But we'll also meet with the project team and get a better understanding of the use of the site and about the hours of operation and a whole range of other things and then we're able to get them to walk us through what their intentions are and then we can at times, we can mark up there and then on the drawings then which is great and then they come back to us with revised drawings (Interviewee #01).

This approach suggests a more iterative and collaborative process as opposed to the rather regimented use of the SBD checklist, although, as will be outlined in the following section, this does not mean that key stakeholders are not engaged in the review process for those who use the SBD checklist.

### *Liaison with Key Stakeholders*

All interviewees identified the importance of liaising with key stakeholders in assessing the crime risks of a proposed development. These stakeholders will often vary depending on the nature of the proposed development. Local police and the local council were highlighted as critical standard stakeholders, while non-government organisations and local community groups were identified as potentially playing a role in some situations.

This liaison with key stakeholders was described as being part of the process of building a picture about the site, the local area and gaining an understanding of any relevant dynamics that currently impact on crime and might contribute to crime in the future.

Interviewees #01 and #05 summarise the purpose and benefits of speaking with local stakeholders:

You might door knock residents or met, as in the case of one of the country things, we've met community groups who are concerned about a particular development, a youth centre for example, or a controversial design of a shopping centre (Interviewee #01).

For larger projects in particular I also try and have a chat with the local area command [New South Wales Police Force areas], just to find out if there's any things that might not be so reported or of significant concern or there's been a spate of break and enter, or whatever it might be, just sort of get more up-to-date information from them, and also if you're walking around at night taking photos, people tend to ask what you're doing and you do get a lot of anecdotal feedback about -- more perceived crime problems than real crime problems. So "Oh that park down there is where all the kids congregate on a Friday night", you know, there's going to be no crime statistics about that but it is still a perceived safety risk (Interviewee #05).

While this generally reflects the experiences of all interviewees, it is perhaps noteworthy that some stakeholders are periodically resistant to being consulted before the development application is submitted. Interviewee #06 noted that some police have been reluctant to talk about a proposed development as they might be called on by the local council to comment on the submitted development application (which seems contrary to the intent of the S79c Guidelines).

### *Prepare Report (including Recommendations)*

The final aspect of the crime risk assessment process is preparing the report. While the actual content of the report will vary depending on the nature of the development, it will invariably contain information and findings based on the previous steps – speaking with the client, analysing crime and demographic data, site audits, review of architectural plans, and consultation with local stakeholders. This suggests a general consistency in the content of the reports prepared by the interviews (consistent with findings from previous research on what makes a good crime risk assessment – see [Clancey et al 2011](#)).

Interviewees were asked about when during a proposed development they were brought in to prepare a crime risk assessment report and the timeframes that they were given to compile these reports. Responses varied, but typically it was suggested that they would be brought in at an advanced stage of the development application process and that a period of three to four weeks would be granted to prepare the report (but one to two weeks was also commonly reported). In

contrast to the majority view, one interviewee noted that they tended to be brought in during the initial phase of a development application because other sections of their company worked on preliminary planning documentation for their clients. This afforded opportunities to identify if a crime risk assessment report would be required. For this interviewee, they estimated that approximately 80 per cent of the crime risk assessment reports that they had drafted were early in the development application process. This was generally seen as optimal (by all interviewees), as it provided the greatest opportunity to influence initial designs.

A key feature of the crime risk assessment report discussed during the interviews pertained to the capturing of the process of the development of the report. There was some suggestion that it was important to capture the processes involved in developing the report, given that changes might have been made to the architectural plans as a consequence of interaction between the consultant and the architect (or other built environment professionals). In the case of Interviewee #01, they have a meeting to discuss the draft report which often includes changes that have been made along the way:

... when our draft report's gone through, which we ask them to verify any areas or omissions in the report, but when they've actually gone through and make comments for a start and then we've gone back and said, "Well we've identified this", etc, etc, and they've actually made those changes to the drawings that have come back to us, so we know they've actually taken it on board (Interviewee #01).

This resonates with the findings of research into the preparation of Crime Impact Statements (CIS) by Greater Manchester Police. Monchuk (as outlined in Monchuk and Clancey 2013) noted that the 'process of undertaking site visits and liaising with the applicant throughout the creation of the CIS document is often not documented' (2013, p. 84).

Related to this issue is how clients respond to the reports and the recommendations contained in the reports. This will be considered in greater detail in the following section.

### **Maintaining Independence**

A central tension of developing crime risk assessment reports is the independence of the consultant preparing the report. Given that the consultant is contracted by the client who is aiming to develop a particular site, it is highly likely that pressure (overt or covert) will be brought to bear on the consultant to produce a favourable report.

Interviewee #01 highlighted this tension:

The other issue we face all the time ... It's certainly relevant to us and that is our independence. The clients are not sure; they think we're working for them as other consultants do in submitting a report in support of the development ... we are very clear about our independence (Interviewee #1).

Issues of independence are brought to the fore when recommendations are made to modify some aspect of the proposed development. Interviewees suggested some flexibility in responding to requests from clients to amend recommendations, but also highlighted that certain changes could not be countenanced:

As a company we are independent so to a certain degree we will alter some recommendations but only if we stand by that. So we wouldn't alter them to make it easier for them (Interviewee #04).

Interviewee #02 reported having less problems with recommendations being accepted, largely because they can be explained in the context of ensuring that the development application gets approved:

... I've never had anyone that I recall say "No, we can't do that", this, that or the other. It's always "Yep, we'll do that because then this will go through and this will tick the box." And as soon as you explain it and explain how it applies from the perspective of whether it's surveillance or territorial reinforcement or risk based management or whatever aspect it is, they go "Oh yeah, okay, I understand that." So no, they're quite accepting" (Interviewee #02).

This issue of the independence of those preparing crime risk assessment reports warrants further exploration. While there were some differences in the responses from the interviewees, given the central importance of an independent, objective analysis of crime risks of proposed developments, there is merit in exploring this issue further in future research.

### **Lack of Consistency by Councils Reviewing Development Applications**

Crime risk assessment reports are prepared as part of a development application that will be submitted to a consent authority (which is most often a local council). Numerous reports prepared by an array of consultants (potentially including environment, heritage, acoustics, traffic, etc.) are submitted as part of this development application process, and they are assessed by the council for their compliance with the various planning controls. At the time of writing there were 152 councils in NSW. While some aspects of planning controls are consistent across the state, there are other dimensions that are determined locally. Specifically, Development Control Plans (DCPs) are the domain of local councils and can cover various issues, including site-specific planning requirements, urban planning context, water and energy requirements, and late-night trading regimes (amongst others).

A recurring theme (or frustration) arising during the interviews was the lack of consistency across councils. This, it was suggested, causes confusion for developers and make for uncertainty in preparing crime risk assessment reports:

... what we don't have is consistency. So Council A will have had quite good quality guidelines regarding CPTED in place for some years. Others still have nothing in place today. Others readily accept, and I've seen this many times, where a developer has had a report where there's been basically a paragraph saying this development meets the requirements of CPTED or words to that effect, one or two lines, and that's what goes through council and that's what gets the tick (Interviewee #03).

Similar sentiments were echoed by Interviewee #02:

I guess just the inconsistencies in the planning requirements for each council. Some councils are very good at documenting things in their DCPs about what they would like to see specifically addressed and that differs from council to council (Interviewee #2).

Interviewee #01 perhaps more forcefully voiced these frustrations: 'I think in many cases councils do not have a clue what they want. Nor do they know what to expect when a report comes in' (Interviewee #01).

The development of a standard DCP dealing with assessment of crime risks across all councils was advocated as a way of addressing these inconsistencies. However, there were concerns about adding further planning controls. As highlighted by Interviewee #04, there is concern that there are too many planning controls currently (a view shared by the NSW Government, see Hazzard (2013) for commentary about the excessive 'red tap' of the NSW planning system):

... but I don't think it necessarily needs a whole list of controls and more regulation. I think there's too much of that in the planning legislation as it is ... (Interviewee #04).

Reconciling these tensions between consistency and excessive regulation are difficult to resolve in the context of the overall NSW planning system.

### **Professional Development and Research**

Interviewees were asked how improvements could be made to the development of crime risk assessment reports. Apart from improving the consistency of council procedures, two themes emerged – the need for greater professional development and research.

The lack of professional development opportunities was highlighted as a barrier to improving professional practice (consistent with the recent observations of Knapp 2013 and Ramsay 2013). Those who had completed the SBD course reflected on the absence of any follow-up training or subsequent professional development opportunities. Relatedly, it was suggested that there has been too little investment in determining the impact of this work on preventing crime and too little engagement with research in informing ongoing practice:

It would be really nice to find research that shows a good example and longitudinal research to say this is what happened before this building was designed and then it went in and how it's had a positive impact on a community (Interviewee #02).

This echoes other research that has called for greater analysis of the impact of CPTED and processes such as these ([Zahm 2005](#); [Schneider and Kitchen, 2007 and 2013](#); [Butler 2013](#); [Cozens 2014](#)).

### **Conclusion**

Since April 2001, with the introduction of the S79c Guidelines in NSW, (in some circumstances) crime risk assessment reports have been submitted as part of development applications. These reports, as demonstrated by previous research ([Clancey et al 2011](#)), vary in length, content and analysis and that the authors of the reports were generally private companies with expertise in social planning, architecture, engineering, and crime prevention. Little research has previously been undertaken into the experiences of the authors of crime risk assessment reports and the approaches adopted in the preparation of these reports. This current article has attempted to partially address this gap.

Interviews with seven consultants engaged in the preparation of crime risk assessment reports in NSW revealed broad similarities in the steps taken to assess the crime risks of proposed developments. While not sequential, the key steps identified by the interviewees were:

- Talking to the client (often a developer)
- Conduct site audit(s)
- Analyse crime and demographic data
- Assess architectural plans
- Liaise with local stakeholders
- Prepare the report

While these processes were common across the interviewees, the different disciplinary backgrounds, professional experience and training courses of each interviewee shaped the way in which they approached this area of work (which for some was only a small component of their overall work). A key influence shaping how the interviewees approach the preparation of crime risk assessment reports is whether they have completed the SBD training developed and delivered by the NSW Police Force. Those that had completed this training (three interviewees) discussed their use of the 100 item SBD checklist as the basis for guiding their work. The other interviewees use less prescriptive methods informed by their various backgrounds and experience.

Broadly speaking, the process of being engaged to develop a crime risk assessment report varies depending on the nature of the development, the relationship between the developer and the consultant/consultant's company, and planning controls. Interviewees highlighted different timeframes and points of engagement, with general agreement that engagement early in the development application process is beneficial, as it provides greater opportunities to influence preliminary designs. However, most interviewees reported that they are often engaged toward the end of the process, almost as an after-thought (similar to Monchuk's (2011) findings from research conducted in England and Wales). Consequently, the interviewees reported that they often had short periods of time to complete the work. While four weeks was a loose average, most interviewees mentioned projects in which they were given a fortnight or less to compile a crime risk assessment report. This perhaps reflects the tensions raised by some interviewees about their independence and the perception of some clients that a consultant contracted to develop a crime risk assessment report should comment favourably on the development to aid its passage through the development application process.

The interviewees were generally optimistic about the utility of the crime risk assessment process. However, various limitations were identified with the current arrangements in NSW. The inconsistency of planning controls and review procedures across council areas has created uncertainty and made it difficult to know what is expected by each council. This, the interviewees argued, means that approaches to assess crime risks are patchy across the state. A generic CPTED-specific DCP adopted across the state would help to overcome these problems, although concern was expressed by some interviewees about adding further planning controls. Given the current proposed reforms of the NSW planning system and the focus on reducing 'red tape' (Hazzard 2013, Rummig and Davies 2014), it is perhaps unlikely that a standard CPTED-DCP will be adopted by NSW councils.

In reflecting on ways that their work could be aided, the interviewees suggested that ongoing professional development was of considerable importance and greater research (especially post-occupancy evaluation) should be undertaken to better quantify the impact of this work. Given the

general challenges of measuring crime risk, a number of interviewees argued that more research would help to inform their practises.

Beyond illuminating practises and activities that have rarely been interrogated within the academic literature, this modest research also contributes to discussions about private entities operating on the fringe of the crime control and prevention landscape. While much focus has been given to discussing the impact of neo-liberalism and the rise of private providers in the context of the criminal justice system (O'Malley 2008), little attention has been given to exploring the practises of these diverse actors. Private prisons and private security have received the lion's share of the attention given to the emergence of private providers. The host of other private actors engaged in crime control and prevention work have been less frequently the focus of analysis. Further, there is little doubt that these private actors are operating in the emerging field of risk evaluation which is gradually finding its way into increasingly diffuse areas of late modern life. As we saw from our participants, the ways these risk evaluations have been undertaken vary to a significant degree. While some of these participants risk is assessed using quite closed quantitative instruments, while others take a broader more 'subjective approaches'.

It is difficult assessing the nature of the market for crime risk assessment reports. Based on the experiences of the interviewees and the volume of reports written by some (in excess of 300 by interviewee #01), it would appear that this area of work can be lucrative. Without knowing the fees paid for the preparation of these reports and the annual number of reports produced by each interviewee, it is difficult to accurately determine how lucrative. Interviewees were divided on whether the volume of this work was increasing or decreasing. Those that said that it was increasing described activities to enhance their visibility in the market, while for those who reported a decline in this work seemed to compensate for it through other work streams. More detailed analysis would need to be conducted to accurately assess the overall size, shape and contemporary trends of this market.

Not a prominent feature of the interviews, but nonetheless of interest, is the mix of activities undertaken by the consultants. Each worked across different areas, ensuring that the preparation of crime risk assessments is only one part of their overall work. Those with social and urban planning backgrounds undertook projects linked to these disciplines, while those with risk or security backgrounds completed various projects in these areas. Some consultants mentioned working interstate and internationally, further demonstrating the lack of reliance on NSW crime risk assessment reports as a main source of income. This suggests that the introduction of the s79c Guidelines in 2001 in NSW has created opportunities for work for previously unrelated companies or consultants. Some of those working in crime prevention appear to have added crime risk assessments to their scope of activities; some social and urban planning companies/consultants have similarly added this area of activity to their work, augmenting their planning services; and some security risk assessment professionals have extended their existing work to include crime risk assessment reports. Perhaps reflective of these different disciplinary approaches, one interviewee suggested that: 'On one hand it's a science, on the other hand it's an art ... the whole CPTED design stuff' (Interviewee #01).





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