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Title of paper

Empathetic Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Community

Paper (maximum 4000-5000 words including references)

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Empathetic Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Community

This paper reports on recent research into crime-reduction strategies and crime-experience in nine areas with concentrations of public housing, in three Australian States. At question is the extent to which spatial and social community-renewal programs introduced by State agencies can be said to have reduced crime over the five-year period (1997-2002). The research was carried out in the Faculty of the Built Environment @UNSW and under the auspices of AHURI: The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. All images, graphs, tables are excerpted from *Volume 1: Main Report* (Samuels, Judd, Barton, O'Brien, 2004).

Before focusing on findings we believe to be salient it is necessary to first appreciate that a wide range of research methods were employed to approach this complex task - to allow for reflection on such interactive forces. Interviews with stakeholders from salient agencies (public housing departments and police services) set the scene; 300 residents recounted their experiences of crime and fear (which were mapped) and their sense of social cohesion was elicited; spatial analyses of crime geo-coded at micro-urban scale mapped the frequency and distribution of crime – an epidemiological signature of what happens, where and when; crime hotspot analyses reflected movement in property and personal crime trends at each place evaluated; two 'walk-through CPTED' analyses generated environmental design and crime reflections, the mapped distributions acting as guides; and the overarching context was five-years of police crime data – allowing for trend analyses of movement in the defined areas. Together, these multi-dimensional processes allowed for evaluations of the effectiveness of social and spatially orientated intervention policies implemented over the same time-period. Serendipitously, *indicators of crime-experience probability* emerged from the research process, allowing for robust interpretations (see below). Causality was not the issue; our efforts were directed at associating relationships of input and outcome - as rationally as possible, given the complex real-life context of the research.

Specific crimes considered in the research covered the major 'common' offences committed in the public realm 'against the person' such as assaults and robbery, and other forms of harassment and victimization like verbal abuse, and offences at the interface with property including theft from and damage to dwellings and cars. Excluded were domestic violence

(beyond the realm of this research) and very serious but much rarer crimes such as murder. Only those incidents reported to and recorded by the police services were mapped and trend analyzed. Unreported victimization events are endemically difficult to access in crime research, although the resident survey was a small move in that direction – where their experiences could be mapped and overlaid on crime patterns emergent from the police data.

From the research process itself the utility of three crime-indicators became apparent, allowing for an assessment of crime intensity without reliance on rates (notoriously misrepresentative). A **C**rime-**E**xperience-**I**ndicator, first, is a measure based on geo-coded police data (48,562 incidents here) - at whole-of-area scale; the CEI representing the proportion of a given population in a given area expected to experience crime in an average year. A **H**otspot-**E**xperience-**I**ndicator extends this notion and represents crime-intensities probable at specific places, the HEI thus locating experience in space. This indicator was utilised to evaluate movement trends at hotspots, of both personal and property crime at micro-urban scale, which, in turn, allowed comparative analyses of strategic interagency interventions – and, ultimately, *interpretations of their apparent effectiveness in reducing crime*, as reflected in a **C**rime-**R**eduction-**I**ndicator or CRI (see: Figure 6).

Several findings of interest emerged. A whole-of-government approach and interagency partnerships (grounded in memorandums of understanding) between housing and policing agencies (in particular) are recognizable as *necessary* first principles of sustainable engagement and effective intervention. Managing crime is now widely understood to be the responsibility of a range of State agencies and local community groups. In itself, however, this paradigm did not appear as *sufficient*. Rather, a major outcome of this policy-in-practice research points to 'empathetic interaction' with individual members at micro-urban scale being associated with crime tends falling over time. Partnering with communities, thus, needs to go beyond, or better, beneath the standard involvement at neighbourhood and community group level, and connect with individual members of those communities in an interactive and personal way. The potency of self-esteem and self-actualization, and a concomitant sense of responsibility for one's socio-spatial environment emergent from that – are seriously underestimated factors of community engagement.

Ways of thinking and ideologies are fundamental to all policy-making, and determine the form they take. In this regard, in the recent past management paradigms in housing and policing agencies in Australia have shifted significantly towards more 'open-doors' strategies.

*) Including illustrations and references

These are evident in culturally-sensitive tactics and de-stigmatization approaches appropriate to the marginalized groups usually inhabiting areas of public housing, and in the community-interactive police officers, now CPTED-enlightened, within the general context of community-housing and intensive place management processes pitched at interpersonal level. From the research findings, these strategies seem to be effective. Agents can now merge and become integral partners in 'their' communities, as affected as anyone else by local quality-of-life standards. In cognitive-behavioural terms, emotional states are cognitive transactions where alliances or 'contracts' can influence behavioural change and associated attitudes. A positive response to interest shown in one's welfare is another powerful motivator (the 'hawthorne effect'). A generic theory would suppose that intervention which enhances self-esteem is likely to be instrumental in a positive way, where the replenishment of psycho-social capital increases social cohesion and augments 'natural policing' potential in a community.

Such strategic attitudes and approaches were specifically apparent in the two areas in which crime was found to be *reducing* (all the more salient since both are *high crime experience* places in themselves, populated by socially and economically disadvantaged and culturally marginalized communities). Here there were trend reductions in CEI, HEI and longitudinal crime patterns. A broad range of policies had been implemented, often similar to those in other areas where crime was however still rising, but here a significant proportion of the implementation was also possibly at this more humane scale.

Related to this, and crucially important moreover, is the finding that socially-focused strategies appear relatively more effective in reducing crime than spatially-based re-solutions. Forty-eight percent of the personal crime trends at specific hotspots in high social intervention areas were on the decline as well as 42% of trends in property crime, compared to only 24% and 30% at hotspots in the more spatially-focused areas, respectively.

A further relevant outcome of the research relates to the intensity of spatial distribution and co-incidence of crime where public housing clusters are located. This pattern emerged throughout all nine areas: they seem endemically crimino-centric. There is even possibly evidence of a spill-over into adjacent privately-owned areas, as if the crime is *diffusing*. The clustering pattern appears at whatever scale mapped; a generic, micro-urban map, indicating this phenomenon is shown in Figure 1 (over).

Figure 1: generic urban micro-scale map

[black = public housing, white = privately-owned housing; icons = symbols for crime types mapped]

From the walk-through evaluations of all the areas it became apparent that both spatially and physically it was difficult to distinguish the public from the private housing, other than the obvious cases where some streets are clearly relatively up-market. Only with the locational maps supplied by the housing agencies was it possible to make the assertion that crime clusters in the public housing zones. Neither the quality of the housing itself nor the urban configurations seemed to be associated with higher or lower prevalence of crime.

Rather, it appears logical that public housing policies that *allocate* the most disadvantaged people in society to designated areas thus concentrates both crime and victimization there. These same buildings and places occupied by people with different attitudes and life chances would surely give rise to different sets of behaviours. In Australia over the last decade a Federal public housing policy has been imposed on the States, where they must prioritize and accommodate the most seriously disadvantaged members of society first. This includes: the mentally ill, now that the institutions have been closed down without the provision of compensatory community-housing, the homeless and the destitute, the abused and the victims of domestic violence, all of whom doubtless require welfare housing - but each has specific needs that can only be effectively provided for from specific 'commonwealth' funding. Agglomerating the most marginalized people of society together generates negative

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opportunity-potentials in the public housing sector which become ripe for perpetrators and victimization alike - and increases the life quality of no one. Where do the simply poor go to be housed, now that they are considered last in their own already over-subscribed and under-funded system?

From yet another perspective, areas with 'safer-design' features should (theoretically, at least) experience less crime, or falling crime. This did <u>not</u> appear to be the case here. A comparison of two Radburn 'superlot' estates in the same State saliently makes the point. These configurations are now widely considered as criminogenic, and Australian housing agencies, for instance, are seeking to reverse them…to turn houses to face the street, close off rear access paths and public open spaces and convert them to private backyards, and so on. In the estate where crime is falling, however, the same criminogenic *spatial* conditions prevail as before. While in the Radburn-reversal area, where spatial intervention is very high, crime nevertheless continued to rise during the period of the investigation; and even despite the considerable range of social interventions also implemented. From the trend graphs (below) the performance of the two Radburn areas is evident at areal scale, one rising one falling. This same pattern was evident from the hotspot analyses: crime falling in almost all hotspots in the latter, and rising in those of the former. There are several social policy approaches in both areas that are much the same, but others are probably significantly different. In particular, it is suggested here that the positive change emergent in the crime-reduction area is a likely consequence of the one-to-one interactive activities of empathetic police and housing agents – and in spite of the *un*modified urban configuration and *un*improved housing stock.
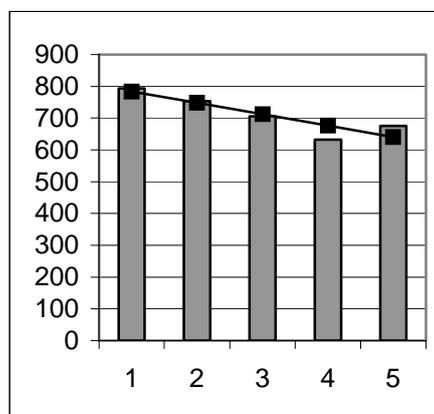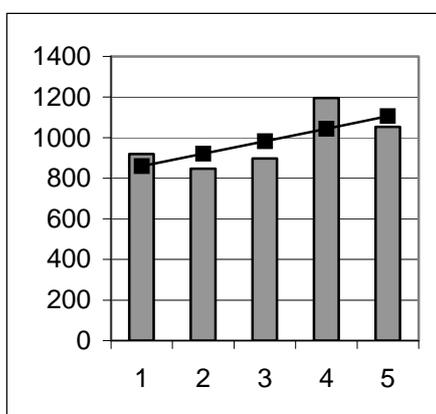
Figures 2 and 3: composite crime trends - reversal area (left), Radburn area (right)

*) Including illustrations and references

Table 1 indicates the general range of strategies adopted in the two areas, which served to inform the interpretation of the hotspot mapping and trends analyses.

These measures cannot be quantified: it is <u>not</u> how many strategies are adopted which is at question but, rather, the qualitative affects that can be detected in the movement of other measures which can be quantified, crime indicators, for instance. The inevitably unknown time factor aside (how long each strategy takes to mature or emerge sufficiently), socially-focussed micro-interactions do seem to distinguish the falling from the rising crime trends; indicating a greater value relative to the spatial and physical strategies.

	Social	**Spatial**
Radburn reversal Commenced: 1998 Stock reduction: 5% Agencies involved: ▪ Housing ▪ Police ▪ Juvenile Justice ▪ Mental Health ▪ Employment agencies	**Moderate** …On-site management team, community development worker, tenant consultation and advisory groups with interagency representation, tenant employment & training, police liaison via crime prevention officer, aboriginal liaison officer, Problem-Oriented Policing (intelligence/targeting)…	**High** …New street connections, dwelling reorientation and upgrades, infrastructure upgrades, community & youth centre, community garden, open space upgrades…
Radburn area Commenced: 1998 Stock reduction: Nil Agencies involved: ▪ Housing ▪ Community Housing ▪ Police ▪ Local Government ▪ Education & Training ▪ Health ▪ Community Justice ▪ Centrelink ▪ Regional tenants association ▪ Numerous private agencies	**High** …On-site community housing management in selected areas, flexible allocation strategies, interagency meetings, integrated whole-of-government service provision, tenant participation and consultation, employment and training initiatives, social enterprise development, food coop, community social events, various social and mutual interest groups, youth drop in and computer centre, youth activities, play groups, problem oriented policing, two crime prevention officers with CPTED training, community policing and mobile van accompanied by local cultural elders, hot spot analysis and targeting, culturally specific crime prevention strategies, security awareness education…	**Low** …Street cleanups, improved maintenance response, community gardens, target hardening, repair vandalism damage…

Table 1: social and spatial policy signatures - reversal and Radburn area

From an environmental design perspective, the photographs below indicate street forms typical in the spatially-modified area, before and after reversal, where the changed sense of place is obvious; undoubtedly necessary in the overall scheme of things. Rationally one should expect crime to diminish once such changes have been implemented, yet it did not. A critical mass or threshold tipping point is possibly necessary for change to take hold and emerge, and more time might be needed to overcome habitual ways of behaving, but in the 5-year time span of this study positive affects were <u>not</u> apparent.

Figures 4 and 5: before and after reversal

At the same time, generic s*ocio-spatial design* issues are always, unavoidably, implicated in criminal and community behaviour: people subconsciously read cues in the environment, interpret places and construct meanings and eventually act out or on their feelings in space and time. Some places are clearly more crimogenic to start with: where situational opportunity and intent coincide, and implode. In all nine areas, for instance, crime experience is high. Unsurprisingly, they also exhibit environmental design characteristics likely to be associated with this situation: extremely poorly illuminated roads, large open spaces and school grounds – with little natural surveillance potential (to be avoided afterdark if at all possible) - and adjacent very accessible, very low-density housing-only configurations characterized by separately-territorialized, individually fenced housing (whether public or private), along people-free streets in an urban context with a conspicuous lack of sense of public realm. Now, add to this equation: socially-excluded and vulnerable crime-prone and victimization-prone populations, and crime experience probabilities rise exponentially. Design factors do generate powerful opportunity-spaces, from situations where communities are more likely to feel secure and 'at home' amongst like-minded others in congruent places to those where people with criminal intent would be more comfortable. These criminogenic factors, however, are endemic to areas where crime is reducing and in which it is increasing. There appears to be little differentiation in these measures, and since all house marginalized

*) Including illustrations and references

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populations, it is surely for some other reasons that crime is falling in some places and not in others. The distinctive cooperative interaction apparent in both of the crime-reduction areas is thus reinforced as a potent factor in improving the life quality and safety in those particular neighbourhoods.
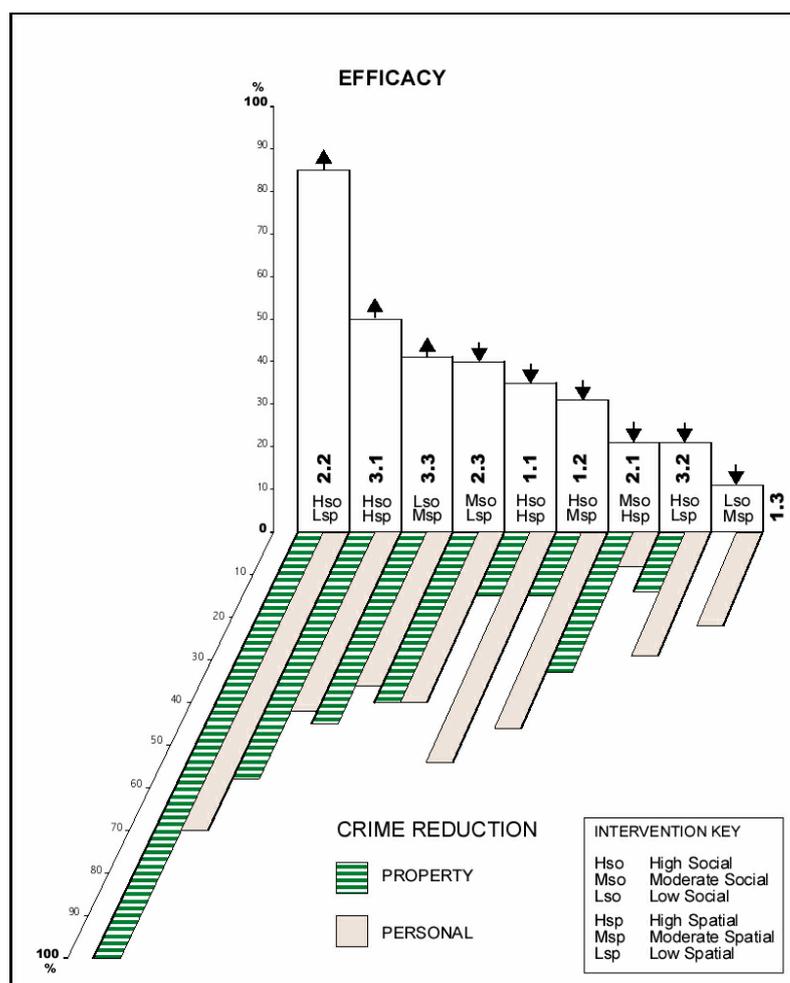

Figure 6: hotspot crime-reduction effectiveness and intervention strategy

The diagram above was constructed to conceptually visualize policy-efficacy, and is derived by calculating the frequency of hotspot locations with falling crime trends: where 100 on each scale is deemed 'effective' (and zero is 'ineffective'). For instance, at all (ten) hotspots in the area coded 2.2 here (the high social but non-spatial intervention Radburn area), property crime is reducing every time (CRI=100%) while crimes against the person are reducing 7 out of 10 times, together representing an 85% mean efficacy. Consider then the position of the area coded 2.1 (the Radburn-reversal area) – and its CRI is only averaging around 20.

Once these CRI measures are associated with the range of strategic intervention most apparent in each area it becomes evident that areas in which crime trends are falling are those where high social interventions are apparent, and also include a significant degree of open-doors and empathetic partnerships.

For the sake of comparison, consider the area coded 1.3, in which crime incidents and crime experience are rising most sharply, where the diagram indicates *no* reductions in property crime at *any* hotspot, and the lowest mean CRI of all - in the range of just 10%, and worsening. An analysis of strategies adopted in this latter area indicate that social interventions are low but traditional problem-oriented policing (targeting offenders) is strongly enforced, while spatial interventions are moderately high, including housing upgrades and some asset sales of public stock - a 'de-concentration' remedy not found to be effective during the course of this research. This confirms the foregoing interpretations.

Ideally, the supposition is that best practice includes security-sensitive urban design coinciding with empathetic partnerships, and that, as a consequence, a greater sense of safety and spirit of responsibility are likely to emerge and help engender sustainable communities.

Irrespective of all the foregoing, it is axiomatic that societal exclusion and minority disadvantage underpin crime and victimization. It is unequivocally an equity issue in the end: the distribution of natural and social capital, no less - a commonwealth responsibility.

Policy implications include: ensuring whole-of-government, interagency approaches involving in particular place-management housing strategies and community-oriented policing, and locally-based, 'non-traditional' empathetic agents interacting sensitively with multicultural communities. A social-control mechanism involving elders in informal liaison with local youths seems particularly potent. Intelligence-based targeting of problem-generating individuals or households, augmented by hotspot mapping, supplements but cannot replace people-oriented approaches - displacing problems rather than addressing them. A preference for psycho-social over physical-spatial strategies in renewal programs seems clearly justified, and recognition of the endemic and recurrent crime in areas of public housing concentration warrants the highest priority being placed on strategic crime reduction potentials - to enhance life quality. Finally, allocation policies that result in the concentration of socio-spatial disadvantage require immediate review and deconstruction.

*) Including illustrations and references

References (www.AHURI.edu.au)

Judd. B., Samuels, R. and O'Brien, B. (2002), *Linkages between Housing, Policing and Other Interventions for Crime and Harassment Reduction in Areas with Public Housing Concentrations: Positioning Paper,* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

Samuels, R,. Judd, B., Barton, J. and O'Brien, B. (2004*), Linkages between Housing, Policing and Other Interventions for Crime and Harassment Reduction in Areas with Public Housing Concentrations, Volume 1: Main Report,* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

Note: Strict ethical constraints applied to the use of police data in this research All spatial identifiers were removed for purposes of reporting and publication. The same system is employed here, to ensure anonymity, and avoid stigmatization. Codes are cited for analytical purposes only, and no reference is made to any area, street, community, person or agency by name.

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