

Evaluating the Use of CPTED in Local Authorities in New Zealand

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As Victoria Owen has said, what we are presenting today is brief account of some of the key issues from the fieldwork from two of the four sites participating in the evaluation. I am speaking today only about the two sites for which I was responsible for the fieldwork and report writing. These two sites were very different and I want to just sketch quickly what some of the significant differences were.

Firstly, the differences relate to the nature, complexity, cost and size of the CPTED-related project that was undertaken: a major re-development of Palmerston North's central city square over several years as part of a re-branding of Palmerston North, requiring a multi-million dollar budget; and, in Christchurch, the designing and building of a dual purpose amenity (bus shelter and toilet) in one of Christchurch's older, suburban parks, on a budget of about \$40,000 and taking approximately 6 months to complete. So, one project was a 'once-in-a-lifetime' project, as it were; the other was the sort of important but routine CPTED-focused project that city councils are likely to undertake all the time.

Secondly, the differences relate to issues of safety. Palmerston North had a very serious safety issue to address in that the city had change public perceptions of Palmerston North as a city that was not only as dull and boring, but also as dangerous; these perceptions were having a significant negative impact on the city's population and economic growth. In Christchurch, the occurrence of sexually deviant behaviours associated with the presence of an old, 1950's style toilet block (well hidden in trees and shrubs) had to all intents and purposes been stopped with the removal of that block about 10 years ago. The issue now was to avoid re-creating the problem as a consequence of building a new toilet facility to take account of the needs of those using the children's playground and walkers using the River Walks.

Thirdly, Christchurch City Council adopted a CPTED focus in 1996 and the development of a safe city has been high on its agenda since then; in Palmerston North, in 2003, the idea of 'designing in safety' was a new concept for the Council and public, so creating a range of dynamics that had to be managed by those responsible for the project.

Despite these differences, respondents at both sites highlighted some parallel issues that bear on the success of a project. The three issues I have chosen to comment on today are:

- the significance of context and the creation of aesthetically pleasing public spaces
- the development of collaboration as a necessary feature in CPTED-focused work
- issues relating to what it means to work knowledgably in a CPTED environment.

The significance of context and the creation of aesthetically pleasing public spaces

Context is itself a key element in a successful CPTED project; it structures how key CPTED principles come into play, and the creative conceptual thinking that informs the design; it encourages the use of symbolic references (historical; what plants are used; use of local materials in the design) in order to create a public space that is safe and aesthetically pleasing. There is a close relationship between safety and aesthetics: together they encourage use, and use contributes to safety and to the area's public amenity value.

So, for example, in Palmerston North, a tall set of strong white lights illuminates the broad East/West path that marches purposively across the Square; the lights' design replicates the lighting systems used in the railways and the route taken by the path traces the line of the Main Trunk Line railway tracks, taken up in the early 1960's. In other areas of the Square historical artefacts have been positioned and lit with an eye not only to enhancing safety at night but also to give each artefacts its dignity and status. The statue of Te Peeti Te Awe Awe, a significant Rangitane chief who died in the 1880's, stands on the path where a Maori village once was, while other design features in this sector of the Square link Te Awe Awe with artefacts and spaces that are significant to Maori; the use of flax in some of the plantings reflects the significance of the flax trade in the early days of Pakeha settlement in the Manawatu.

It is quite likely that many people who walk along the East/West path or take the diagonal path past Te Awe Awe do not make all or any of the historical connections. But the point I want to underline is that the way the design of the Square engages with these features is aimed simultaneously at building civic pride and a sense of ownership; these dimensions contribute to an overall impression of the Square as now a safe and pleasing place. Not only has public and councillors' support for the Square project soared, but there is good reason to argue that CPTED design has had a very significant impact on:

- crime reduction and reduction of fear of crime from the completion of Phase 1 of the project
- a major change in numbers of people (people with disabilities; family groups; older people) who make use of the Square not only during the day but also at night
- the range and number of public events in the Square
- the creation of a valued public amenity
- the city's economic growth and steady increase in population.

Albeit on a quite different scale, the question of context and aesthetic considerations were also important in the design of the dual purpose amenity in the Christchurch park. The design had to take account of the fact that the park is in the Special Amenity Area; this factor constrained the style and building materials that could be used and contributed to the project brief asking for a unobtrusive structure. There was a further complication posed by question of choice of a safe location as Council had no desire to re-introduce the problems associated with the previous toilet block. Those working on the project concluded that the safest site was close to the road; people living directly opposite did not support that option. The creative outcome was the construction of a small, interesting and one-off design of a bus shelter-cum-toilet, well lit (at night) and positioned just back from the footpath. It is only self-evidently a toilet from one angle (not one viewed by the neighbours opposite). That location capitalises on the informal surveillance provided by the neighbours and those using the busy road. The surveillance and the building's design discourage loitering, and no loitering has been reported.

Working collaboratively

Part of achieving a successful outcome in both projects involved the adoption of a collaborative approach. In Christchurch, the project designers worked closely, for example, with staff from the Transport section, so becoming aware of Transport's intention to build a bus shelter on the park borders. Sharing knowledge of each others' work programmes meant that:

- the project was more cost-efficient; one well-designed, and unobtrusive building was able to do the work of two

- complex set of functional and aesthetic requirements encouraged creativity in concept and design
- the available budgets from both units could be used on the project.

The design team also commissioned an independent CPTED report from another section in Council. The assessor's brief was to review the choice of location for the facility and assess safety issues in the Park as a whole. Having the report and its findings available meant that staff could discuss community objections on the basis of a set of established principles pertaining to safety, rather than on questions of personal preference – it is easier to respond to objections on the basis of work that is structured around a set of principles that are open to discussion. Further, the review of safety issues in the park as a whole meant that the plans could go to the Community Board responsible for sign off, with staff able to detail how wider safety issues had been addressed.

One of the important features of the Palmerston North project was the collaborative relationships forged between the design team and the CPTED consultant, and this group and the main community stakeholders. These relationships were based on:

- a mutual and active respect for each other's knowledge and expertise
- the ability of all members to accept constructive criticism and revisit issues
- the development of shared macro goals.

Council could rely on key stakeholders, such as the Police, to turn up at relevant Council meetings to support the project either just by their presence or verbally if asked to comment on issues. Community stakeholders also used their positions in community organisations to speak for the project and to discuss concerns about aspects of the development.

The CPTED consultant was also a key player at Council and community consultation meetings, helping formulate and present the messages focused on key issues about the benefits of the CPTED-focused plan for the re-design of the Square. One respondent emphasised the importance, when confronting hostile or uncertain audiences, of keeping such messages clear and simple. The consultant also walked uncertain or opposed councillors through the Square to identify and respond to their concerns; and developed visual aids for use in community meetings to assist people getting a good sense of what was proposed. It is useful to add that several respondents commented on difficulty many people have in interpreting architectural drawings. In order to address this problem, Christchurch staff now use 3-D images of what is proposed superimposed on a photograph of the site to demonstrate more easily what the effect of the development will be.

Building collaborative relationships as part of the work of building and sustaining public endorsement for a project with key players does take time, skill and flexibility but it is critical task and, as Palmerston North has demonstrated, has contributed to on-going collaboration and synergies between key organisations to develop initiatives focused on reducing the potential for disruptive behaviours in the CBD that complement the CPTED approach.

The last comment I want to make in relation to collaboration is that respondents underscored the importance of ensuring that other sections of Council are involved in the project early on so they understand what the design intends and how this affects their on-going work. For example, maintenance sections, who will have on-going responsibility for upkeep etc of a site need to know that there is an adequate budget for the work and that they will not inherit a maintenance legacy.

Working knowledgeably within CPTED framework

Palmerston North City Council has begun the process of using CPTED principles in its everyday work, while Christchurch has used CPTED principles to its work in public spaces for a decade. Respondents supported such developments because they could see the value of the approach. Both councils bring in consultants to run training seminars for their staff. The question of training, however, does raise a number of questions that will need to be addressed at the national level.

- What sort of training is available – does it, for example, involve hands-on work and critique of that work by the trainers?
- Do the training sessions build on previous ones or do they largely explore the same territory?
- What level of supervision is available from more knowledgeable and experienced senior staff on a regular basis? Peer supervision has its strengths; it can also result in the blind leading the blind, to put it crudely.
- Who defines what it means to be “trained” and qualified to carry out this type of work?
- Should some form of certification be established so that there are agreed and transparent means of determining what levels of knowledge and skills any particular consultant brings to their work?
- Given that certificatory frameworks endorse some modes of knowledge and skill and not others, what sorts of knowledge and skill are marginalised in the process and what are the implications of such marginalisation?

My final point is that working knowledgeably within a CPTED framework also means that its limitations are well understood and that claims about its effectiveness are not overstated. As various people commented, CPTED is not about crime elimination but its reduction. If the public does not understand that, then the fact that CPTED-designed projects are bound to attract some vandalism can reduce support for the project and dubiousness about the approach can spill over into other projects.