Participatory mapping for crime prevention in South Africa – local solutions to local problems

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SUMMARY: *Community policing remains more a talked-about concept than a practice actually taking place in South Africa today. In spite of much legislation pointing to the need for people's participation, there is limited understanding of how this should be done. The emphasis in this research note is on a process that is being developed that might provide one such methodology to assist the police in its approach to partnership policing. The application of community participatory action planning processes and practices to the crime prevention field was initiated by urban researchers, and resulted in the development of the model described here. Initial results indicate that the process allows people to understand that crime does not occur randomly but that it happens in certain and predictable places. The process has the ability to empower communities to act together with the police in order to prevent and reduce violent crime.*

I. INTRODUCTION

COMMUNITY POLICING IS a much-discussed concept that entails a coordinated partnership approach to solving problems related to crime. It means different things to different people, but has at its core the notion that actions to inhibit crime or address its causes are necessarily community based. The essential role that public participation plays in development processes has long been recognized. However, its relevance to crime prevention methods has not been so explicit in South Africa.

This research note describes a process that has been developed over the past several years in an effort to assist government to establish appropriate strategies to reduce crime and violence. Much government legislation places an emphasis on the involvement of people in community development; this is seen to promote local empowerment, but also to ensure accountability, legitimacy and transparency on the part of government agencies. In the safety and security sector, legislation endorses community, sector and partnership policing, but does not elaborate on how this should be implemented.

The research that went into the process described in this paper was undertaken as part of a more general attempt to apply participatory methods to crime prevention. It started several years ago with work carried out near Pretoria, South Africa, with two low-income urban communities. More recently, the model came to the attention of the South African Police Services (SAPS), and it is currently being utilized in the Northern Cape

Province as support training to the SAPS, with funding from Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The researchers who developed the model are also using it in work they are carrying out in KwaZulu-Natal as part of a local crime prevention strategy.

The conceptual base of the model described here is grounded in the understanding that people know best the places where they live. The recognition that certain places lend themselves to certain types of crime, and that local residents are the experts in the problems and opportunities presented by their own neighbourhoods, stimulated the development of a process whereby this information could be unlocked and made available to others. This process, in addition to providing a closer understanding of local spatial dynamics through the eyes of the users, can itself become a basis for improving relations between local residents and traditional policing structures.

This, it was recognized, could lead to more effective police–community partnerships, based on improved trust and confidence, which could, in turn, lead to more and improved intelligence from the community. Underpinning the approach was the notion that when people are integrated into the process and their opinions are solicited, they will take responsibility and ownership more readily for the areas where they live. In essence, the process under development is aimed at three very practical objectives:
• to identify problem places at a local neighbourhood scale;
• to prioritize the places most in need of attention; and
• to investigate interventions and develop responses by identifying key role players and responsibilities.

As this work is ongoing, it is presented here as a research note, with a brief background to the research, a description of the methods being used, and some initial findings and successes.

II. BACKGROUND

IN 1977, THE Pretoria-based CSIR[1] Building and Construction Technology undertook research into the relationship between crime and the physical environment. This research, funded by the South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), supported one of the four pillars of the then National Crime Prevention Strategy, called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The research approached the reduction of crime from a spatial and design perspective rather than a criminological one, and the researchers – urban planners, architects and designers – brought their experience in housing and community development processes to this approach. After reviewing international approaches to CPTED, they extended this recognized approach to incorporate a focus on the planning and management of space along with the design component. They also placed people at the centre of their research and took into account the developmental role that crime and its prevention could play when this dynamic was applied. This research led to the production of a series of manuals for the SAPS. The most recent publication, which will be available in 2005, examines good practices for social crime prevention projects in South Africa.[2]

Evidence emerging from CSIR's research shows most pertinently that most violent personal crime occurs in low-income communities. In fact, most of the crime that occurs in these communities is of a violent and personal nature. By contrast, the majority of crime in the more affluent

3. See reference 2, Kruger et al. (2001), page 14.

suburban parts or the central business districts in urban areas is property-related.[3] Links between land use and crime types became apparent when crime statistics were broken down by location at the local scale. A direct link between undeveloped and vacant land and crimes such as rape, murder and assault was recognized during research carried out in Johannesburg during 2002.

Since the democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, participatory processes have been applied to the housing sector (People's Housing Process) and to the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process (every municipality must prepare an IDP, which is linked to the budget). The researchers responsible for this work are therefore familiar with the concepts of participatory planning, and the way lay open for them to apply these, together with their spatial understanding, to the field of safety and crime prevention.

The workshop model was developed over a period of several years. Initial work took place near Pretoria with two community groups from Mamelodi, a former "township" accommodating some 700,000 mainly low-income African people. This work was initially carried out with input from Justine Coulson, a visiting UK-based social development researcher, who had been working with people with disabilities in South Africa.

It was always the intention to identify appropriate officials who could act as facilitators of this method. So when the SAPS expressed interest in the approach to support their own training in community-oriented crime prevention methods, this original model provided an essential foundation. The process has undergone further refinement since the beginning of this year, through working with SAPS and community groups in the Northern Cape Province. In addition, the CSIR is currently using this model to support community participation in its implementation of a local crime prevention strategy in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The process is being written up and will be available in the form of a facilitator's handbook due for publication early in 2005.[4]

4. See reference 2, CSIR and ISS (forthcoming).

The following description of the process focuses on the model as it evolved through initial residents' workshops near Pretoria and became more refined through its use with the police and other Northern Cape resident communities. The training process that was designed for the police essentially followed the same model, as it was decided that the training concept would be an experiential one whereby the police facilitation trainees would first experience the process as participants and then observe/assist the CSIR facilitators with community workshops in the policing sectors for which they were responsible.

The chronological sequence in the development of the model was as follows:
• December 2002 – January 2003: initial workshops held with two community groups resident in Mamelodi, northeast of Pretoria – facilitated by the CSIR researcher and the visiting UK-based social development researcher.
• February 2004: CPTED training for SAPS.
• March–April 2004: SAPS-sector police experiential training in the participatory mapping process – facilitated by CSIR.
• April–June 2004: community mapping process workshops with residents of two Northern Cape towns – facilitated by CSIR and observed/assisted by SAPS.

Figure 1:	The basic elements of a crime
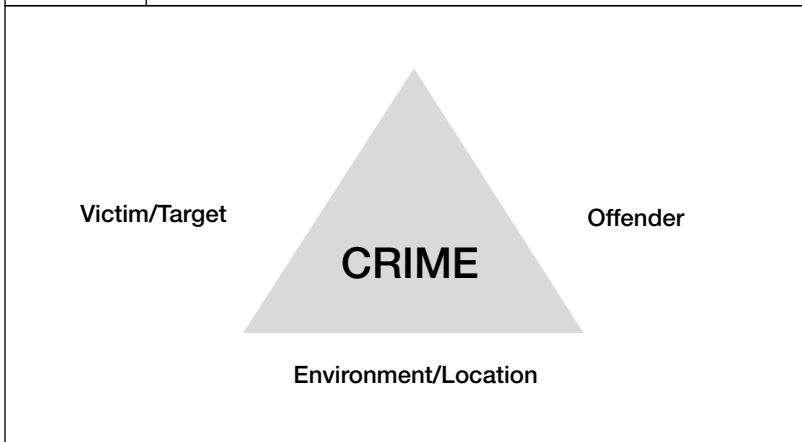
SOURCE: Liebermann, S, K Landman, A Louw and R Robertshaw (2000), *Making South Africa Safe: A Manual for Community-based Crime Prevention*, CSIR, Pretoria (page 4)

III. PEOPLE-DRIVEN CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH PLACE MAPPING – THE PROCESS

THE PROCESS CONSISTS of a one-and-a-half-day interactive experiential workshop with a maximum of 20 participants at a time. All the participants should come from the same neighbourhood, although a mix of ages and genders is encouraged. The material that is presented and worked with during the participatory process is divided into nine consecutive steps.

The workshop focuses on gaining a spatial understanding of the local area (neighbourhood) under discussion and of the role that physical location can play in the execution of a crime. Conceptual diagrams, drawings and maps are used throughout the process. The emphasis on drawing is important, as it is a spatial medium.

The first step involves setting the scene and discussing crime, place and crime prevention. Many of the resident community participants have never heard of crime prevention, therefore this introductory step outlines the three factors necessary for a crime to occur – a victim, an offender and the location where the crime takes place. A consideration of what allows a crime to take place encourages discussion regarding its prevention.

"Just as the occurrence of a specific crime depends on the presence of and interaction between these three factors, so too does crime prevention involve a response to one or more of these elements."[5]

When the crime location is taken into account, each participant can play a role, as every person's experience of that place is different (Figure 1).

It is made explicit that, during the workshop, only the place where a crime occurs is discussed. Other preventive measures, oriented towards the victim and the offender, are not considered.

The facilitator proceeds to describe her own experiences of where and how she feels frightened and why. By drawing a cognitive map depicting her house and the places in her neighbourhood that she identifies personally as dangerous, she encourages people to realize that, although each of their experiences is individual, they share common elements.

The participants then draw their own maps of where they live and where

5. See reference 2, Kruger et al. (2001), page 6.

Photo1: Plotting the places on the large-scale map of the local area

they feel threatened. Questions are necessary to prompt some people, but generally people were found to be ready and excited to draw their experiences. By drawing, rather than writing and talking, possible problems associated with literacy are avoided. This also prevents potentially stronger workshop members from holding the floor to the exclusion of more reticent types. Drawing also allows emotions to come to the fore better than rational discussion. The entire process is directed towards enabling individuals to get in touch with their fear of particular places and to realize that there are certain common places that also present a threat to other people. It was found that drawing the place provided better access to these feelings and understandings than other mediums.

Splitting up into smaller groups, the participants then transpose their individual maps onto prepared large-scale maps of the neighbourhood (Photo 1). Each participant plots his/her house and the dangerous places that they have identified (Figure 2). Many of these "hot-spots" are the same, and most of the community workshops ended up identifying some 15 to 20 hot-spots. This is approximately five times as many places as the police identified in their workshops.

The smaller groups then come together and compare their maps. Tracing paper is used to show the confluence of many of the identified problem places. Planning an itinerary for site visits to each of the identified places in the afternoon then provides for much discussion and social interaction.

During the site visit to each place, the problems are articulated by the individual(s) who identified the place. This allows personal knowledge to be shared, as well as highlighting different experiences based on age, gender and other characteristics. Questions pertaining to the place assist the discussion: What activities take place here? Who owns this place? When do the activities occur? Is it dark? Why is it dark? What makes it isolated? What makes it easy for criminals to operate here? Who are the victims? What types of crime occur here?

The site visits conclude with photographs being taken to record the places and their problems. Taking photographs also acts as an important empowerment mechanism – looking through the camera's viewfinder

Photo 2: Preparing the presentation of the problem place

allows a different perspective for the picture-taker by literally focusing attention on the specific place.

The following day, the photographs are distributed to the respective groups, and the places are documented in terms of the previous day's analysis. The information is organized according to the crimes that occur there, the victims, the offenders and the characteristics of the place (Photo 2). Its spatial relationship to the surrounding fabric is also considered, for example how the place acts as a link (or a barrier) between the houses and their surroundings, and the type of activity that it encourages (for example, illegal drinking in residential streets).

The problem places are prioritized according to certain criteria, for instance the types of crime that occur there and whether other role players, such as the local authority, are required to alleviate the problem. It is important to be able to justify to the larger community why one place was selected rather than another. Particular places are selected by the smaller groups and are presented to the larger group.

How these places are viewed is dependent on the facilitation – the objective is to reach a common understanding that crimes do not happen randomly but, rather, because particular opportunities present themselves in specific places. Based on how the problem is defined, it is possible to begin to consider a solution.

The development of a solution is a joint exercise for the whole group, and tests the skill of the facilitator. It is important for everybody to realize that the solution is often more complex than just identifying someone (usually the police) to blame for not doing their job. A solution might well require the coordinated input of several players other than the police, such as local authority councillors and officials. Thus, the realization dawns that crime prevention is not only a policing function but that it also requires a partnership approach.

What we have tried to impart to the participants is the role that communities must play in safeguarding their spaces – people need to use the spaces responsibly, they should take legitimate ownership of the spaces and they

Figure 2: Map of a neighbourhood indicating problem spaces and houses, as identified by community workshop participants
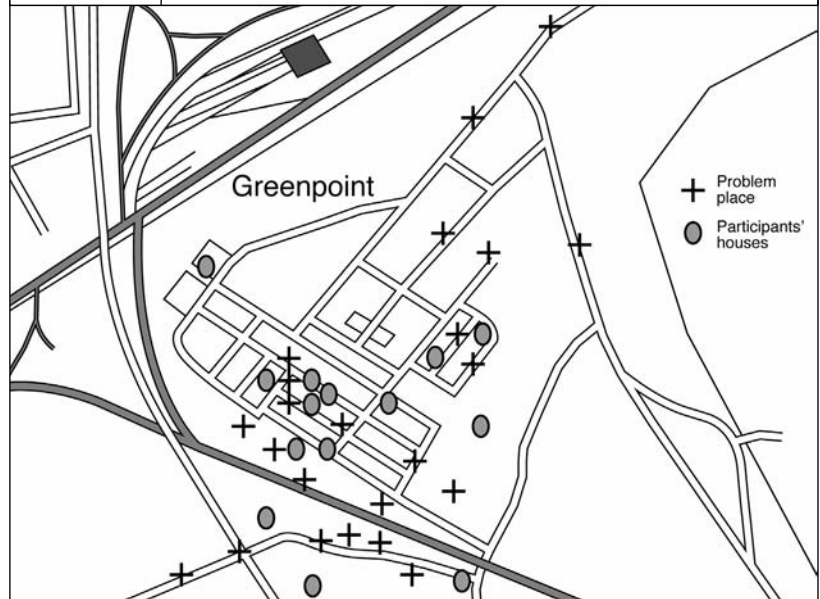
should be encouraged to provide information about problem places.

So far, all the facilitators carrying out the workshops have been CSIR researchers, who are urban planners, architects and designers skilled at analyzing places according to their potential for crime and violence. Prior to workshops aimed at training the police as facilitators, an initial session on the principles of crime prevention through environmental planning and design was presented to the police, to expose them to the concept of CPTED.

IV. INITIAL FINDINGS

ALL THE WORKSHOPS that have taken place with resident community members have been well received, with the participants taking part enthusiastically and positively. It is believed that this is because they focus on an issue that participants are both worried and angry about.

Crime creates fear and also a frustrating sense of powerlessness. Therefore, when given an opportunity to talk about their experiences of crime, it was found that people of all ages and educational backgrounds were keen to participate. Importantly, by focusing on an issue that everyone is affected by, and by relying on visual representations wherever possible, it was possible to include everyone. By splitting up into smaller groups, it was possible to keep everyone engaged in a way that would not be possible in a plenary open meeting.

When facilitated correctly, the workshops provide a space in which community members discover that they have a shared knowledge of their local area, superior to that of outsiders, including the police. This comes to the fore when they act as guides to their neighbourhoods. They are subsequently better equipped to communicate this knowledge in a coherent way, using the visual data produced during the course of the workshops.

Photo 3: The alleyway with the tuck shop at the end – children en route here during break were mugged regularly

The value of this community knowledge was illustrated in the Northern Cape Province, where the crime mapping completed by the police identified fewer than ten key locations. The subsequent community mapping revealed an additional 20 locations that police officers were either unaware of or had not given any importance to. Similarly, the information regarding the types of crime that took place and who the victims were was new to the police. The material that was produced in the workshops was viewed as a resource by the police, and provides a base for future work (Figure 2).

In addition to making workshop participants aware that they have specialist knowledge that can help the police in their work, the workshop process also makes them aware that crime is not an illogical, unpredictable social phenomenon over which they have no control. Many participants were initially sceptical when told that the aim of the day was to understand where crime happens and why. They retorted that: "…*crime is everywhere*." However, as the day progressed, and points and places on the individual, sub-group and plenary maps began to overlap, it became clear that there were key locations where crime was particularly high.

Importantly, when crime is an everyday occurrence, people may fail to see the distinction between those crimes that can be prevented by a change in spatial dynamics and those crimes that they cannot prevent. An example that came up in one workshop was the case of a narrow alleyway linking a school and a tuck shop that was regularly used by school children during their break, and where rapes and muggings had occurred (Photo 3). For a mother whose daughter attended the school, this was simply a typical example of a crime occurring in her neighbourhood. However, at the site visit, it became clear to the mother that if two staff members were to police

the alleyway, the problem would no longer exist. One uncontrollable crime became an issue of the teachers' neglect of duty.

For the police, the workshop model has two benefits. The first is the hard intelligence that can be gained from an understanding of the crime environment from the perspective of the people who live there. The second is improved relationships with community members, and the increased confidence in the police that can grow out of this. But valuable as it might be for them, experience also indicates that the workshop model challenges police members by asking them to engage with community members in unaccustomed ways. There is a tendency for officers to want to remain at the front of the workshops and to direct them in a didactic way. However, it is important that the officers sit with individuals and sub-groups and share their experiences. While the facilitator may need to occupy the "front-of-the-class" position at the beginning of the day, the participants must have the opportunity to present to the entire group and direct some of the session themselves, with the facilitators sitting among the participants. A facilitator needs to believe that the participants have important experiences to share and that s/he is there to learn and participate, even though s/he has the role of facilitator. The ability to communicate and to be open about one's own fears is critical, and it raises questions about the appropriateness of facilitation by the police. The concern is particularly relevant given the SAPS' recognized misgivings regarding the necessity for sector or neighbourhood police to "…be social workers in addition to police."

The police–community hierarchical relationship is not the only one that is potentially disrupted by the workshop model. Power relations within the community were similarly threatened and are dependent on personalities. Community policing fora (CPFs) are the recognized communication and liaison structures between communities and the police. Their functioning depends on several factors, not least the personalities who lead these structures. Sometimes, these personalities presume to hold a monopoly on issues of safety and security. The workshop model creates a direct channel of communication between general community members and the police and other municipal officials, which can act to diminish the power of some/elected community representatives as the sole channel of communication. Without being confrontational, facilitators need to be able to manage sensitively those participants who aim to disrupt workshops. Intervention by the facilitators may not be necessary – as the workshops developed their own dynamic, it was found that such individuals had a decreasing influence, as either they were drawn into the activities by the energy of the other participants, or their constant complaints and negative comments were sidelined as the groups developed their maps and shared their ideas.

V. CONCLUSION

THIS PAPER OUTLINES an actual process as it was developed through action-research, and describes actual experiences that took place in different neighbourhoods in three different urban areas in South Africa. It highlights the role that crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) can play in reducing tensions concerning violence and the fear of it, and in improving relations between people on the ground and officials. It does this by concentrating on the places where crimes occur and by adopting a practical problem-solving approach through the sharing of common experiences of identified crime places.

Because the location of a crime provides the focus of the approach, it is not coincidental that the process in question is derived from the spatial planning and architectural fields. The potential of the community crime prevention workshop process for understanding the spatial dynamics of urban areas and their activity patterns, and the relevance that this understanding has for reducing crime and violence in certain circumstances, cannot be underestimated.

This paper also describes some of the strengths and challenges presented by the application of a community participatory process to the crime prevention field. The process has important implications for improved relations between potentially antagonistic groups – in particular, residents of local communities and the police – and for the promotion of community policing, since it provides a practical application for this partnership approach. At the same time, existing relationships and hierarchies can sometimes present an obstacle to the successful implementation of this process, and facilitators need to be aware that traditional policing approaches could be challenged by the necessity to empathize with local residents about their real and perceived fears of violence and crime. Similarly, because the model provides a direct communication channel between the police and the people, some community leaders might find their power base undermined, and feel threatened by the potentially improved relations.

It is hoped that the reasoning behind the process becomes internalized within policing practices, so that the benefits of participatory planning can be felt in this sector. To this end, CSIR Building and Construction Technology is developing a workbook to assist this process.