National Criminal Justice Reference Service

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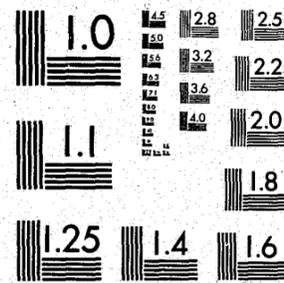
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THE SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION

FOR THE STUDY OF DELINQUENCY

PLANNING FOR DELINQUENCY?

WHO PREVENTS CRIME?

A REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCES OF 1977 AND 1978

64224

CONTENTS

"DEFENSIBLE SPACE": A POLICE OFFICER'S VIEW

By: Superintendent Archibald MacKenzie, Strathclyde Police.

Le Corbusier, master of modern architecture, described a house as a machine for living in. Today, in much of the industrial western world, the machine is often seen as faulty in design, and the lifestyle it contains appears to be breaking down. No one can deny that crime in cities throughout Europe and America has escalated at an alarming rate in the past 30 years. But what is still far from being conclusively proved is how architecture and planning decisions can aggravate or inhibit criminal tendencies.

Some experts place the blame squarely on high-rise dwellings. Newman, as you have seen, does not doubt this, while the recently published French Government report "Response to Violence" emphatically condemns high-rise dwellings and unchecked urbanisation, saying bluntly that the soullessness of urban centres has a direct link with crime. One must also consider, however, the crime and vandalism problems of conventional Scottish housing estates. Vast amounts of money have been and are being spent on housing schemes such as Drumchapel, Easterhouse and Castlemilk – surely as soulless as any of the French researchers found – in attempts to rectify past planning errors; but still complaints from residents about vandalism and disorder increase yearly. Basic amenities such as shopping centres, community centres and good sports facilities came late to these schemes. Lack of licensed premises brought endless complaints to the police of disorder on buses returning from the city late at night.

The French recommend that building policies for new towns should be designed to counteract the isolation of the first inhabitants with adequate facilities for each successive group of tenants. Not every teenager wants to

join a youth club: I contend that it is just as important to provide attractive cafes and a cinema, subsidised if necessary - facilities which could well counter the problem of teenage drinking.

S.G. Checkland in his book "The Upas Tree" wrote: "It is not enough to purge the remedies of social failure by pumping in public money, more profound remedies are required involving a much deeper understanding of outlook and motivation and of the social problems which produce them". The care which is being taken to consult with and keep informed the people of Glasgow's East End on redevelopment plans indicates that the lesson has been well, if belatedly, learned there.

There is no doubt in my mind that good building design and town planning are essential to crime prevention; but there is more to the problem than that. Consultation with the future residents, not to mention a balanced social mix, are equally important, and the relationship between these factors is still a far from exact science. As Mrs. Holmes has said, in Britain at any rate serious research into the links between building design, urban planning and incidence of crime is still to be carried out.

Police crime prevention officers have for the past 20 years been advising on the physical security of buildings. The term "crime prevention officer" is something of a misnomer, as the remorseless rise in crime figures show. I was much attracted by the following quotation which I think describes our duties exactly: "If we were concerned that people get wet when it rains, we should not attempt to stop the rain but would take steps to provide shelter". Most of our past work has been designed to deter the opportunist criminal by a show of physical strength, usually on commercial buildings. The determined criminal of course is not deterred: he will attack other more vulnerable buildings. This is well shown by the rise in attacks on dwellinghouses as shops become better protected.

It/.....

It is only in the past few years that we have looked
deeper into the problem and have become aware of the
need to tackle crime on the social "community involvement"
front as well as with physical protection. The close
link between these factors is best illustrated by the
need to advise on planning as well as construction of
buildings.

One of the earliest critics of modern trends in
architecture was the American Jan Jacobs. She said
that a neighbourhood was not just a collection of
buildings but a network of social relations involving
the familiar faces of the local residents, tradesmen
and police. She argued that it was no gain to supplant
long neighbourhood associations with the professional
advice of social workers attempting by inadequate therapy
to combat the trauma of social dislocation: points which
many of us will - I hope - have some sympathy with.

Perhaps the inadequacies and weaknesses exposed
during the Community Development project at Ferguslie
Park is an up-to-date example of what Jan Jacobs had in
mind. In this project the community workers appeared to
become increasingly isolated from the realities of crime
and its damaging effect on local people striving to
improve the quality of life in an area of multiple
deprivation.

Jacobs forstalled Newman by criticising the reduction
of streets by the creation of superblocks surrounded by
vast open recreation areas. She prophesied that these
vast undefended areas would become the domain of
predatory elements who would drive the intended users
behind the locked doors of cars and flats. As you have
seen from the video tape, Miss Jacobs's prophecy became
true in America; and its ominous signs are now present
in many parts of Britain. She advocated a safe and
animated neighbourhood by multiplying side streets,
reducing anonymous open spaces and placing shops and

services on streets formerly devoted to houses
only. In short, Miss Jacobs considered that a busy,
well-used street inhibited criminal activity.

Twenty years later her words were echoed, albeit with
Gallic eloquence, by President Giscard's committee, which
stated: "One should never underestimate the consequence of
each urban project on the possibility of violence. The
construction of new underground garages and closed modern
elevators without windows multiply the possibilities for
crime. Regulations for preventing violence should be
observed during construction just as regulations for fire".

Both these writers will find a response from any
experienced policeman who has dealt with urban crime
and disorder.

Where young people are concerned I consider that changes
in physical environment alone will not by themselves
relieve delinquency. Although street furniture should
be well designed to resist vandalism - and I may say that
vandals have an intuitive grasp of stress fracture in
building materials which would be envied by many civil
engineers - reliance only on ultra-strong materials merely
presents a challenge to the vandal. There should not be
too much communal space: it is difficult to maintain,
and unkempt surroundings do not encourage pride in a
locality. Speedy repairs are vital - there is a strong
imitative element in vandalism.

Recent studies in Liverpool show that up to the age of
10 years vandalism can be classed as incidental to play,
but from 13 years upwards it is essentially daring, a
defiance of society. It was estimated that 30 to 40% of
this age-group engaged in vandalism at some time or other.
It is essential to pay particular attention to this group.
School programmes, youth clubs and sports facilities all
help, but do not, I beg you, put play areas next to old
folks' sheltered housing schemes, as happened in several

places in Strathclyde. The sound of young voices at play is not endearing to old people hoping to indulge in a post-lunch nap as the local beat constable could have told the planners.

Newman claimed that robberies increased in frequency with the height of buildings, from 2.6 per 1000 persons for 6 storey buildings to 11.5 per 1000 for buildings with 19 or more floors. The French report based on researches in 11 cities or urban areas, goes further, finding that the rate of criminality increased among those who lived above the sixth floor in tower blocks. One of their more interesting conclusions was that the crime graphs indicate that in the French urban context the significant point is in a population of around 220,000 inhabitants. Beyond this point the crime incidence accelerates considerably. A similar study in the United States indicates the existence of a danger level of about 250,000. So impressed was the Committee by their researches that one of their 105 recommendations is that communities nearing a population of 200,000 should be required by law to monitor the incidence of crime and take action to control any signs of increase. I know of no similar studies in this country but there are obvious opportunities here for students searching for suitable subjects for a thesis.

Many of the Committee's recommendations follow closely Newman's theories: reducing the size of buildings and institutions such as schools and hospitals by the avoidance of 'gigantism' (a descriptive word!) and encouraging individuality in streets and dwellings to increase the feeling of personal identification with an area. The French and Americans share two common objects: reduction in building unit sizes, coupled with the social use of street areas to increase a feeling of caring for and identifying with an area by the members of the community and the consequent inhibition of vandalism and disorder.

Many/...

Many examples of the ability of architectural and planning design positively to encourage criminal activities could be given in Scotland: the soullessness of the housing schemes already described; isolated blocks of shops, such as that at Drumchapel where due to the absence of local residents a police presence is constantly required; the dead city centre after closing of business.

On the other hand we have East Kilbride New Town, traditional in style, but highly successful to live in; and a new block of flats which I saw recently in Glasgow where the children's play area was situated within the protection of the 'U' shaped block, both it and the car park adequately but unobtrusively lit by floodlights well placed on the building. Incidentally, much more could be made of lighting to aid surveillance and deter the criminal. An experiment in lighting backcourts in Glasgow was highly successful. Thirteen areas in 'D', 'F' and 'G' Police Divisions were selected, and the results were much better than had been hoped, with substantial reductions in theft and disorder in many instances. Perhaps most important of all, the people living there said they experienced a greater feeling of security and confidence.

Through it all, however, runs an inseparable factor, that of the role of the housing manager. House-letting policy is central to all our problems of vandalism and disorder. The contrast between Knightswood and Ferguslie Park is not primarily one of housing design. It is a contrast between a policy of selective tenancy, and a ghetto where problem families and a high incidence of single parent families have been lumped together with disastrous effect.

What does this mean in Police terms? It means that in recent years Ferguslie Park, with a population less

than one-tenth of that of the whole of Paisley, has been
the origin of 50 to 55% of that town's juvenile crime.
Of 62 cases of serious assault reported in Paisley in
1976, 17 of the assailants and 19 of the victims came
from Ferguslie Park. Of 82 cases of assault and robbery
reported in the same year, 17 took place in Ferguslie Park
with 19 of the assailants and 17 of the victims originating
there. Disturbing though these figures are, how much worse
would they have been without the considerable involvement
of local agencies, who have to live with the problem all
the year round?

Child density too must be kept within sensible limits. One
only has to look at the effect of an inordinate number of
children in two blocks of Red Road Court, adjoining
comparatively well-kept tower blocks inhabited by middle-
aged and elderly couples, to see how vital this is.

Urban crime prevention means much more than fitting
five-lever locks to doors. It means the closest possible
consultation between police, architects, planners, housing
managers and-above-all-the people who will live in the
community. With this sort of consultation, good design
can prevent crime.

Last Friday I was watching a television programme on housing
design, and I cannot imagine a better conclusion than that
of the television presenter: "The architect, as producer,
creates only half of the dwelling: the man who lives in it,
the other half".

END