A South African Commentary on the Articles in the "Cityscape" Symposium on Crime and Urban Form

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The relationship between crime and the physical environment, including urban form, is of particular relevance within the South African context. Two features of crime in this country— crime levels are exceptionally high and crime affects different people in different parts of the city differently—have important implications for interventions in the built environment.

Until 1994, when the first democratic elections were held, the country's apartheid policies directly influenced planning policies and practices that, to a large degree, shaped cities and towns in South Africa. Cities were partitioned into various zones, based on race, with vacant land and other types of buffer zones dividing communities. Informal settlements have since developed on much of the vacant land surrounding townships (Kruger and Landman, 2008). Most poor people stay relatively far from their places of employment, requiring them to spend a considerable amount of time and money on traveling and making them vulnerable during these journeys. The spatial dislocation of the poor also has resulted in the exclusion of many city residents from the amenities and economic opportunities that the city offers.

Despite the progress made since 1994, the form and structure of the apartheid city has not changed significantly. Living conditions for the poor, in many ways, have not improved significantly either (Department of Housing, 2004).

A study conducted in 1998, which addressed the link between crime patterns and urban form, clearly showed the effects of the apartheid city and its contribution to disproportionate levels of safety in different communities. Studies indicate that crime patterns and trends differ substantially, for example, between city suburbs and traditionally poorer areas. The poor in South Africa are more exposed to violent crime than are other groups in the country (Shaw and Louw, 1998).

The symposium article by Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan (2011) addresses the ability of poorer households to improve their quality of life by moving to other neighborhoods with the support

of government, in the form of vouchers. More background on the purpose of vouchers would have been useful, because it is not clear exactly how the voucher program functions. The issue of mobility and quality of neighborhoods is also a matter of concern in South Africa, however, with questions being asked of the effectiveness of the government's housing subsidy scheme in creating better functioning settlements. Through the scheme, eligible poor households may receive a 40-square-meter house at no or little cost. These houses are normally provided on the outskirts of cities, however, perpetuating the inefficient structure of the apartheid city and re-enforcing existing crime patterns.

Although Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan (2011) aim to determine if the voucher program is effective in helping participants move to relatively safe neighborhoods, it may have been useful to touch on the role that potential employment opportunities could play. Despite crime being a very serious concern in South Africa, in many cases moving closer to potential job opportunities is more important than moving to a safer neighborhood.

The two articles dealing with the HOPE VI Program (Cahill, 2011; Jones and Paulsen, 2011) address issues similar to those raised about housing and upgrading projects in South Africa, including the so-called Urban Renewal Programmes and medium density mixed housing developments. One key difference between the South African initiatives and HOPE VI lies in the nature of the environments targeted for upgrading. In South Africa, these areas are often informal settlements where people live in temporary shacks and have limited access to municipal services and other resources. A significant potential exists, therefore, for improving the quality of life of the households benefiting from the initiatives. Substantial research still needs to be conducted on the displacement of crime and the diffusion of benefits from these projects, but results will likely vary, depending on the local conditions.

It would be very interesting to apply in South Africa the risk terrain modeling techniques that Caplan (2011) uses, because the criminogenic factors might well be very different in South Africa, due to the urban form in this country, as discussed earlier. For example, the private minibus taxi industry carries a major part of the commuter traffic; because they stop anywhere for passengers, bus stops might not be a criminogenic factor in many areas.

Regarding the study by Harris et al. (2011) on juvenile recidivism in Philadelphia, several studies (Altbeker, 2007; Pelser, 2008; Simpson, 1998) were conducted in South Africa on criminal activity. The urban fabric in South Africa is different from that in the United States because of the apartheid legacy and other factors, but it also contributes to juvenile recidivism as indicated by Harris et al. (2011). Further, according to Pelser (2008), a key driver in South Africa is that the political struggles during the 1970s and 1980s made crime and violence acceptable. These struggles resulted in liberation, but they also led to uneducated youth and the general breakdown of the family and schools (Pelser, 2008). This breakdown led to a culture of crime being "cool" and resulted in a high level of recidivism. Pelser (2008) further indicated that 76 percent of juvenile delinquents were themselves victims of crime, which was not part of the study by Harris et al. (2011).

In South Africa, the criminal can commute far to commit a crime, because some residential areas are far from places of opportunity and because it is common to commute far for work. The study by Schmitz (2004) on the geographic profiling of serial rapists and murderers looked informally

at distance decay, which was a factor of the transportation modes available to the offender and the target backcloth. O'Leary's (2011) modeling on distance decay may provide a basis for a similar distance decay and crime modeling in South Africa.

Following the lead of countries such as the United States, South Africa established a Child Protection Register in 2010. During August 2011, however, Parliament revealed that, after being operational for 16 months, the register contained the name of only one person deemed unsuitable to work with children (SAPA, 2011). This failure emphasizes that, although a study such as that of Grubesic, Murray, and Mack (2011) would be very useful in South Africa, it is not possible without an efficient justice system.

Acknowledgments

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