IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY IN PUBLIC PARKS FOR CRIME PREVENTION

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this portfolio is research based education regarding the importance of safety in parks for crime prevention. By exploring the growing importance between safety, public parks, and crime prevention, learning about all factors incorporated and supporting the subject are both keys in understanding the relationship as a whole. The urban and built environments, crime statistics and perceptions, safety audits, design, conditions, and various other factors contribute to the overall picture of safety.

This portfolio will have the intent of informing both the professional planning community and the public through the following objectives:

- The importance of safety in public parks
- What a safety audit is and why they are important
- The relationship between crime and safety
- The importance of crime perceptions created by users
- How redesigning spaces can make them safer
- The accuracy behind crime statistics
- The importance behind user experience
- How to inform and educate the public
- The importance of maintenance and conditions in public parks

These objectives serve as a guide or backbone to this report. They not only help the audience understand importance of safety in a public space, but also the versatile, original, and engaging ways to increase safety, reduce crime, and help make communities grow to become stronger.

BACKGROUND

Importance of Public Parks

Parks are areas of public open space that vary in size—ranging from large national parks to mini neighborhood parks. They are maintained in a natural or semi-natural state and are set aside for designated purposes such as recreation. Parks offer an oasis within cities, and they allow residents of all calibers to connect with nature, enjoy company, breathe fresh air, and engage in physical activity (Dannenberg, Franklin, & Jackson, 2011). Parks provide the opportunity for residents to feel established in their communities while offering mental and physical health benefits for users. A park that meets the needs of users, connects people with place, provides a positive experience, and remains diverse and interesting is what distinguishes a park as safe and usable.

Public parks and other public spaces are used by communities, residents, and visitors alike and are vital to increasing overall health. People seek out parks because they provide contact with the natural environment and they presents opportunities to socialize, relax, and take the time they need outside to improve their quality of life while offering an outdoor comfort and security. Well-designed and well-used spaces, especially parks, are valuable assets in a community. But when that space becomes a liability, vulnerable, or ultimately unsafe, the park loses value and benefit (Dannenberg, Franklin, & Jackson, 2011). Addressing safety within parks is complex because the problem at hand cannot be solved with one action or solution. It requires integrated strategies, community involvement, interactive programs, and education in order to be properly approached.

Fig. 1: Norman B. Leventhal Park located at Post Office Square in Boston, MA (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, n.d.). This park presents areas of relaxation and is located near a central hub of activity.

What is Safety?

The Citizen's Taskforce believe the reason safety is so important when it comes to the health of residents, is because a safe outdoor environment becomes more inviting to the average user. This makes the space more enjoyable for various types of users and the activities they do (National Recreation and Park Association, 2010). Creating a safe place amounts to more than just feeling comfortable at night, it means that it will be utilized to the fullest extent during all hours of the day and helps to satisfy the needs of a community.

A "safe" park is defined as:

> "A dynamic place where the design, maintenance, and policing of the park work together so that the general public perceives the park as a safe place, wants to go to the park regularly, and spends their optional time in the park engaged in valued activities. Crime and disorder is limited, and diverse usage of the park by different groups is tolerated. Legal activities are the dominant activities in the park. Because the local community values the park, it has a sense of ownership of it, and there are sufficient numbers of users who act as natural guardians to ensure informal social control. They also support formal interventions by park management and police when such interventions are necessary" (Hilborn, 2009).

A "risky" park is defined as:

> "A place where crime and disorder has become the norm to the degree that local users consider the park unsafe, try to avoid being in the park, and limit their time in the park to necessary activities. Crime and public disorder such as vandalism, littering, dog fouling (leaving behind the dog's solid waste), alcohol and drug abuse, and public sex have become the dominant activities in the park" (Hilborn, 2009)

The difference between an unsafe park and a risky park based on these definitions is about the state of said crime. An unsafe park is experiencing a decline in the park based on lack of maintenance, or the presence of unsafe amenities that has the potential to make future users uncomfortable. Risky facilities are part of a new theory about crime that furthers the idea of hot spots. Some examples include: bars, drugstores, convenience stores, certain neighborhoods, and parks. A risky park is large and attracts high numbers of users, the park contains things with high vulnerability to theft or vandalism, the park is already located near a high crime rate area, the park has a poor physical layout that makes offending easy, and poor management practices that enable offenders (Hilborn, 2009).

What are Safety Audits?

There is importance behind safety, perceptions, user experience, and conditions of public parks. Safety audits are one form of data collection that planners can gather information from to gauge what aspects of a public park are positive, and whether there are trouble areas that need improvements. This method was developed in Canada by the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children (METRAC) and has been used across North America, Australia, and Great Britain to evaluate the perceived risk in various urban environments (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018). The purpose of a safety audit is to identify nonconforming products and designs, installation problems, and environmental conditions that could pose long-term hazards to users.

Audits are performed by people in the community, making it a good tool for gathering information that residents find important to that space. It is also a good way to get people involved in their community, it makes them feel valuable, and helps them feel like their voice is being heard to make positives changes in their communities. Safety audits can be done that are based on participation and feedback from users at a given space. They allow for an evaluation of the physical environment regarding fear of crime and perceptions of safety (Project for Public Safety, 2008).

Designers and planners are not always able to fully comprehend the fears that users feel when in a certain space. Safety audits can become instrumental in helping to establish a better understanding between park users and the designers. They can identify issues of layout, site features, maintenance, programming, and usage which the community deems to be unsafe (Project for Public Safety, 2008). But overall, safety audits are tools to provide an inventory of design solutions to help make parks safer.

Crime in Urban Parks

Parks are often considered difficult to monitor compared to streets and buildings whose boundaries are much more defined. Park boundaries can vary from simple to more complex but are still harder to surveillance. Parks are difficult to patrol, hard to lock-up or close, and it is hard to install any sort of alarm system. Things such as vegetation, especially trees and naturalistic settings, inhibit surveillance and closed-circuit television (CCTV) is unlikely to cover the entirety of a park. Due to the lack of constant surveillance in parks, crimes and other issues are only addressed when someone makes a call for security or police response (Hilborn, 2009). Even with this problem present, parks still remain low on the list of policing priority.

Other research suggests that there are three cues that indicate a potential risk that heighten user fear for safety in parks: darkness, disorder, and finding themselves alone or in the presence of others who

are perceived to be threatening. Crime and fear are linked to disorderly behavior in public places as well. Pedestrians and users think that the public places that lack control are the places where "anything can happen" (Painter, 1996). There are always uncertainties that go along with findings regarding cause and effect relationships. There exists numerous studies about parks, crime, and safety, but it is important to note that some findings can appear inconclusive, inconsistent, or even conflicting, but certain patterns still appear across several studies regarding this particular relationship. These patterns are found in the statistics occurring in these categories: minor crimes, aggression and violence, serious crimes, and community policing. The studies that were conducted in the categories tested the relationships of vegetation and crime in built environments, and are most often influenced by social situations (Wolf, 2010). In urban park settings, dense vegetation and densely wooded areas are associated with fear of crime. In a study involving college students, they were asked to illustrate "fear maps" showing correlated fear with the presence of trees, shrubs, and walls that concealed vision and escape options. Another study found that vegetation itself facilitates crime. Park managers and park police indicated that dense vegetation is used by criminals to conceal their activities (Wolf, 2010). The conclusions of the two studies showed that dense vegetation provides potential cover for criminal activities, increasing the chances of crime, and increasing the fear of crime itself.

History of Public Parks

Urban parks have played a vital role in growing American urban life. The Boston Common was considered the nation's first city park in 1634. Other parks created before 1800 include National Mall in Washington, DC (Trust for Public Land, 2008). The vision of urban parks were centered on providing natural settings in an urban environment. Frederick Law Olmstead was a landscape architect who designed parks that were called "pleasure gardens". His view was that of a "natural, somewhat pastoral environment where city residents could escape the hustle and bustle of city life" (Walls, 2009). In the late 1800s, Olmstead went on to design Central Park in New York City, Washington and Jackson Parks in Chicago, and Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

By the early 1900s, visions for urban parks began changing thanks to the Progressive movement which included a demand for "reform parks" that provided recreation opportunities (especially for children), and close-to-home neighborhood parks. After World War II, the interest of parks went away and when everyone moved into the suburbs, suddenly families had backyards of their own, making the idea of parks obsolete (Harnik, 2006). Around the 1990s was when city populations of urban areas began to grow, and Harnik noted that this was the time that city parks began to experience a revival.

Unfortunately, even today, a comprehensive national dataset containing local park acreage, facilities, and characteristics does not exist. But, the Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence (CCPE) continues to collect information on parks in 75 cities. These parklands range from acreage in Santa Ana, California; Jacksonville, Florida; Anchorage, Alaska; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Honolulu, Hawai'i (Walls, 2009).

Fig. 2: The Boston Common (The Boxer, n.d.)

Fig. 3: National Mall, view from the Washington Monument (National Park Planner, 2016).

Fig. 4: Akaka Falls State Park, Hawaii (GoHawaii, n.d.).

RELEVANCE TO THE PLANNING WORLD

The planning world deals with many vast issues and opportunities for improvement. It can range from environmental and public transportation issues to housing developments and public design. In this case, the relevance is safety within the built environment and the best ways to inform planners about crime prevention approaches and alternatives. Aspects that are planning heavy such as urban design and park design are vital to research in order to understand the impacts they can have for park access and public safety. Incorporating valuable information from fellow planners and understanding simple tools such as safety audits can increase overall knowledge of how to proactively approach the issue of crime.

Steps to Take Toward Safe Parks

The National Recreation and Park Association believes that designers, operations, recreation staff, and citizens alike all have vital roles in helping to create safe park environments. The following key factors should be considered and known in the planning world when dealing with park safety issues:

- Perceptions that a park is unsafe are as important as actual safety.
- Involve users in the design or redesign of park spaces.
- Clear and understandable signage helps enhance the feeling of safety because it allows people to orient themselves.
- Formal/informal surveillance or the extent to which activities in parks can be observed by other people is important for reducing vandalism, inappropriate activities, and feelings of isolation.
- Lighting to enhance perceptions of safety, although this may not reduce actual crime rates. Improved lighting and increased legitimate activity allow for greater nighttime surveillance.
- Clear sightlines give the perception of actual safety because people can see what is ahead and around and if other people are visible.
- Physical access should be maximized by providing users with a choice of legible routes to and from park areas.
- Good maintenance is crucial to maintain perceptions that areas are low risk. Vandalism can contribute to perceptions of fear because litter, graffiti, and broken furniture all suggest a place is uncared for and possibly unsafe.

- Diversity can attract a higher intensity of use. Variety in the form, color, and texture of landscape elements as well as a range of activities contributes to an interesting environment that attracts users.

- Signage in the form of maps and descriptive text promotes a greater sense of safety because people feel safer when they know where they are and how to get to where they want to go.

- Access to telephones and park staff can provide a greater sense of well-being and safety.

- Citizen involvement fosters a sense of ownership and pride and builds a constituency of users with an interest in keeping parks safe.

- Enforcement of rules concerning inappropriate activities need to be maintained to prevent a cycle of withdrawal and hence a reduction in positive use.

(National Recreation and Park Association, 2018)

Fig. 5: Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade in San Diego may look mostly concrete, but it has safe features including and open sightline, lighting, maintained landscaping, buildings, and legible routes (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, n.d.).

How Design Reduces Crime

There are steps that planners can take towards designing safe spaces for the future or renovating and redesigning existing ones. Michael Cannavino, CPRP, is the Assistant Terminal Agency Coordinator and Communications Training Officer for Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department. He wrote an article about using design to reduce crime, touching on various factors such as assessments, principles, and obstacles. He believes that law enforcement agencies spend too much of their time and resources towards practices that are reactionary regarding crime, as opposed to using more preventative

measures. The proactive strategy is called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or CPTED (Cannavino, 2016).

The theory of a "Crime Triangle" is a helpful model that was developed to analyze issues for CPTED based projects. It takes a proactive approach towards preventing the occurrence of a specific crime. An initial assessment of a situation starts in the center of the potential triangle.

The initial assessment asks these questions:

- Do you feel there is an individual committing this crime, or a group?
- When is this crime occurring?
- Is it day or night, or in a specific timeframe?
- Who is being affected by this crime? Who is the victim?

These questions help the assessor understand the situation and what items need to be focused on in terms of how to increase the safety and stop the issue. It is also crucial in analyzing what is occurring on the edges of the Crime Triangle: victim, suspect, or location. If all three of these elements can be identified, then there is a crime present, but crime prevention is possible if an element is removed (Cannavino, 2016).

Fig. 6: (City of Mount Pleasant, n.d.)

The CPTED project works with specific design principles to progress towards deterring criminal behaviors while helping to positively impact the image of an affected area. The strategy is meant to be used in law enforcement and a variety of departments including marketing, planning and design, maintenance, media relations, and more (Cannavino, 2016). The following principles are incorporated into CPTED, outlined by the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC):

1) Access Control—This uses environmental design to help limit the access and egress points. It guides positive and negative users towards a specific direction within the park. By controlling

access in the space, crime committers or negative users feel more uncomfortable and less likely to commit the crime.

2) Surveillance—This eliminates physical barriers that once allowed casual users to engage in scrutinization of the space. Lighting, proper placement of landscaping, well-placed "windows" of view, and reduced barriers are all examples of how design can enhance surveillance.

3) Territorial Reinforcement—A concept that involves facilitating a process that turns over an area to a group of legitimate users whose goal is to own and care for the space. This helps in the elimination or reduction of nuisance behaviors because the negative users will be under increased monitoring.

   a. Activity Support—The amount of space someone has to add positive users to that space is a big advocate within the parks system. Activity support allows people to get creative while engaging with the community, getting a feel of what users would like to see more of, and ultimately implementing those findings into the project.

4) Maintenance and Management—Keeping areas "clean and green" is the minimum for maintenance standards. Have a plan to take steps in creating a clean and well-kept space for users. Things like graffiti, garbage, and damaged property should not be seen by users, so having staff to locate, and clean or fix these problems will help keep the space populated.

Each principle works to show how practicing it can help to benefit organizations by focusing on behavior and analyses of the space instead of catching and stopping the criminals. It helps to provide perspective to the assessment and works to prevent the crime before it happens (Cannavino, 2016). There are some strong overlaps, but each identifies separately for the purpose of convenience and clarity. When used in practice, it is best to view these principles as being steps included in a single approach for dealing with the security of a physical environment. But it should also be noted that CPTED should not be the sole source for crime prevention and does not take the place of more traditional policing strategies but can still lead to success for any organization.

RESEARCH

Importance of Crime Perceptions

There is often a direct correlation between how often residents use a park and how safe they are perceived. Residents often look to the crime statistics in an area in order to evaluate whether a space is safe or not. The perceptions formed by residents and users are often viewed as more important than any crime statistic because it is coming from the community they live in. The Citizen's Taskforce on the Use and Security of Central Park found that there was a direct relationship between level of use and the perceived security (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018). When perceptions of a place or space are formed, they can be valuable information to users, but could also hurt the park itself in changing how often its used.

Potential users can see a park as a place of safety or a risk to be avoided. A potential offender or negative user can see it as an attractive place for criminal opportunities. It is important to understand both perceptions because it determines the overall use of the park (Hilborn, 2009).

When it comes to creating perceptions, it is important to understand what people look for when creating their views of that particular space. The following could be seen as signs that people consider a park to be safe:

- Parents take children there
- Females visit as frequently as males
- Elderly people regularly visit the park
- Workers have lunch or take breaks there

These examples are how people might talk about a park. These observations of a space are what cause perceptions to be made in the first place.

Safety can be judged objectively when measured by facts and figures, and subjectively through perceptions and inferences. Perceptions influence behaviors and cause people to avoid places they associate personal risk, so impressions like higher chances for crime can lead users to not visit that public space, stay at home, or avoid socialization in public (Wolf, 2010).

Crime Statistic Accuracy

Before heading to a new place, people naturally want to discover what they can about that area, and this can lead to crime statistics as well. But, sometimes statistics lack the ability to convey the whole story. Users often look to crime statistics to determine whether a park is safe to visit, but the statistics could potentially be misleading. Many crimes, particularly sexual assaults, often go unreported. So, crime statistics are reflected inaccurately because the low numbers that are presented are influenced by peoples' avoidance of areas that are considered high risk (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018).

There are a few factors that play into the potential inaccuracy of crime statistics:

1) Human Error—This can affect accuracy of crime statistics because of the way data is recorded and entered into a system. If there is error in the original crime report or when an administrator enters the data, a crime statistic might not reflect the truth (McAfee, 2016).

2) Location—When places are located near police stations, schools, or hospitals, the crime rates of the area appear higher due to the high amounts of crime reports at those locations. For example, if a park is located near a police station there are more police present, so more crime is detected which leads to more arrests and reports (McAfee, 2016).

3) Unreported Crime—The Bureau of Justice Statistics says that more than half the nation's violent crimes (3.4 million) go unreported in the United States each year. Crime statistics only count the crimes that were reported, so certain areas may actually have a higher crime rate compared to the presented data (McAfee, 2016).

Checking multiple sources is a way to avoid being misled and also reduces the general likelihood of reading inaccurate statistics.

User Experience

When it comes to the attention that parks receive, it is important to note that there are varying categories of users. CPTED, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, defines three types of users, or "actors": normal, observer, and abnormal.

1) Normal Actors are frequent visitors, volunteers, runners, hikers, fishermen/women, bicyclists, or program attendees who use facilities in the parks and recreation world. The focus on these normal actors is making sure they continue to have positive experiences and engagements with the spaces and/or organizations (Cannavino, 2016).

2) Observer Actors are still positive users and have equal importance to normal actors but are seen as more casual in their activities. Design is important for these types of users because the spaces need to serve an essential function while ensuring safety, especially for those passing through or stopping to have a lunch break (Cannavino, 2016).

3) Abnormal Actors are on the opposite spectrum and are referred to as negative users. They are the users more likely to contribute to the criminal activity in the location, so it is crucial to pay attention in order to develop plans to protect and maintain those locations. In this case, it is less about the individual user, but more so about what is causing or drawing them to the location (Cannavino, 2016).

There are also other ways to better understand an urban park, its users, and their experiences. It is important to look at the following when determining how that park is being viewed:

- The original design and planned purpose for the park, and present maintenance
- How the park is now being used, and by what groups
- Any issues of crime and disorder
- Whether the local community sees the park as risky, or as a safe and desirable place.

This is important because it helps evaluators understand from a different point of view what the issues might be at a park. This type of information can also be gathered from the users themselves in a form of a survey. Obtaining information through interviews, focus groups, or surveys help to cover the bases of all users including the offenders. Including offenders is a good thing as long as they are considerate of others, because public parks are intended to be accessible for all (Hilborn, 2009). Conducting on-site surveys are good ways to record information because the users have a fresh experience on their mind.

There are some key points when conducting them:

1) The survey should take only 10 minutes, at the most.
2) Begin with demographics
3) The survey should contain only a few questions related to a key theme (safety, comfortability, design, improvements, etc.)
4) Do exit rather than entrance surveys
5) Ask everyone what they did at least three times to determine the full array of activities ("What else did you do?")
6) Look at local versus regional use

7) Consider asking people how they find out about park activities (media, posters, word of mouth, etc.)

(Hilborn, 2009)

After gaining the responses, analyzing the information will help determine which characteristics, physical or not, are positively or negatively influencing the user's experience at the park.

Maintenance, Design, and Conditions

There are many factors to consider when creating a safe park, especially design. Good design is meeting the needs of users, the park is diverse and interesting, it connects people with place, and provides a positive experience. While these can help to create the preconditions for effective control, there are still factors to consider when evaluating safety and perceptions of a facility. The National Recreation and Park Association believes the following areas are ones that need to be considered:

- Locate programmed activities near the park perimeter, beside an entrance or along a main pedestrian path
- Locate food concessions at the park edge that serves both the street and the park
- Make sure that activities in the park include a human presence from early morning to evening
- Create programming and physical design of the park to encourage use of the park during the evenings
- Develop activities beyond those for organized sports facilities and playgrounds
- Offer a variety of tours or events that will encourage more widespread use of parks and increase positive uses.

(National Recreation and Park Association, 2018)

Fig. 7: An example of a well maintained park with play structures, picnic areas, garbage cans, and a view from the street (City of Olympia, 2020).

Physical design can either be a risk or a protective factor, and if a park was designed a long time ago, risk factors can be more difficult to deal with. It was not until recently that designers and planners considered crime preventions as a step in the process. In fact, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in the United Kingdom has prepared several reports on park design and maintenance to reduce crime and disorder (Hilborn, 2009). They included in their *Design Guide for Community Safety in Residential Areas* a list of problematic features that can be found in public parks:

- Narrow, unobserved footpaths hemmed between high solid fences and dense planting
- Dense tree and shrub planting that obscures the view of open spaces from adjacent houses
- Footpaths that converge in hidden spaces, leaving no option to avoid secluded areas
- Secluded areas that encourage misuse, posing threats to pedestrians using footpaths and adjoining property
- Children's play areas hidden from view
- Footpath ailments and dense planting that obstruct sight lines along routes to the exit
- Houses whose backs face the park and don't allow useful surveillance of the area
- Pedestrian routes that include unobserved areas blocked by high fences

Fig. 8: This park is an example of houses backing up into the area, lowering the surveillance, as well as low maintenance (Vaughn, 2018).

On the opposite spectrum, good design features were identified as well:

- Railings around the park that prevent vehicle access and keep children away from roads
- No secluded spaces on key footpath routes or against house boundaries

- Traffic-calming measures on residential distributor roads or through-routes, including speed control bumps, surfacing changes, etc.
- Trees planted on the perimeters, selected, and spread out to allow views across the park
- Perimeter roads that provide increased visibility an alternative safer routes for pedestrians at night
- Adjacent housing fronted onto the park that provides good surveillance, a sense of ownership, and benefits from the view
- All pedestrian routes feeding into the park being located on well observed streets

(Hilborn, 2009)

Fig. 9: Franklin Square in Washington, DC shows a connection to the street, trees, and a main footpath (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, n.d.).

Parks help to improve cities and communities, so maintenance and good conditions are critical. Parks are protected, maintained lands that have the ability to improve the environment, in addition to residents using them for daily physical activity. When properly treated and maintained, parks improve air quality, protect wildlife habitats, and provide a place for children and families to connect with nature while taking part in recreation outdoors (National Recreation and Park Association, 2010). There is economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance behind every good park.

In the study, *Decent Parks? Decent Behavior?*, CABE found that a decline in the conditions of the park lead to a decline in use, and an increase in vandalism. The research showed clearly that these declines create opportunity for antisocial and criminal behavior to occur and become dominant (Hilborn, 2009). Due to the results from the study, it should become evident that prioritization of staffing and maintenance of public spaces is extremely important but is not the only step that needs to be taken.

Physical Environment

There are several environmental factors that can play into park safety and factors that can promote crime and disorder. Even if one bad factor is present, because of CPTED there are suggestions on how those unsafe spaces can be improved. Some factors that can promote crime include poor lighting, unclear sightlines, lack of movement predictors, entrapments, no signs, activity generators (both positive and negative), lack of maintenance, usage diversity, no formal surveillance, and isolation.

To understand more clearly and see a visual representation, this chart serves as a positive and negative indicator of each of the previously listed factors. It indicates which instances or lack thereof could be present at any public park:

Environmental Factor	Positive	Negative
Lighting	-Adequate lighting -Intended for night use -Potential hiding areas are visible	-Nighttime routes are dark -Landscaping blocks lighting -Places in inherently unsafe areas no intended for use
Sightlines	-Visible from the street -Paths are unimpeded -Houses overlook the area	-Blind spots on path -Landscaping blocks street view
Movement Predictors	-Designated routes -More than one entrance or exit	-Self-made shortcuts -Lack of paths or trails
Entrapments	-Low-lying or high-branching vegetation	-Trees and bushes that are used by offenders to hide
Signs	-Provide clear directions -Located as decision points -Locators have a map	-Exit routes are not indicated -No direction towards phones, toilets, isolated trails
Activity Generators	-Activities are spread out -Design allow for a refreshment stand -Toilets located near activities	-Isolated portable toilets are difficult to move -Lack of flexible seating -Activities are clustered
Maintenance	-Clear party responsible for maintenance -Design is more resistant to deterioration -Garbage cans present	-Physical disorder is present (graffiti, garbage, etc.) -Capacity has exceeded -Grass is unkept and not mown along walkways

Usage Diversity	-Park provides recreational opportunities beyond team sports (community gardens, senior activities, etc.) -Activities encourage a diversity of users	-Scheduled park activities do not accommodate interests of all users -Certain users take over the park and drive out new users
Formal Surveillance	-Police or park personnel provide formal park surveillance -Park safety plan -Designated officer responsible for safety at the parks	-Park personnel lack training to respond to emergencies -Lack proper security training
Isolation	-A visible "active edge" that attracts activity -People nearby able to hear calls for help -Emergency telephones available -Someone patrols the area	-No one can hear if there is a shout for help -Hidden from the street -Heavy shrubs or fences -No nearby emergency aid, alarm, security personnel, or emergency phone

Fig. 10 & 11: Bryant Park is a great example of a park that encompasses the positive aspects of all the safety features in the table (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.).

CASE STUDIES

Case studies are vital when contributing to any type of research. This section will assess and analyze three different cases that are relevant in understanding how design, community involvement, and varying programs can have an impact of the safety of a public space. Each has important takeaways about why or why not the programs worked and also the results they produced. The locations vary from big and well known cities like New York and Los Angeles to a small town in Georgia, but each have valuable results that help provide relevant background information to best approach the issue of crime prevention.

Reclaiming Bryant Park—New York, New York

Bryant Park went under a restoration in the 1980s, originally built about one hundred years earlier. It has become one of the best new urban parks in America due to the design and elements that provide ranges of activities all available for working and shopping residents and visiting people to use. The challenge that Bryant Park faced was about who was utilizing the park and why. The park has a fantastic location right in midtown Manhattan, but people often avoided entering. This was because the park was poorly maintained, the activities going on inside included people dealing drugs, and was poorly designed, all contributing to the downfall of this once loved park. The main problem was that the users who did go into the park found that there was nothing to actually do once they got there.

The Bryant Park Restoration Corporation (BPRC) was created in the late 1990s to help manage the park and create a master plan. The plan focused adding these renovations to the park:

- Opening up park entrances to avoid and remove visual barriers along the park's edge
- Adding new amenities that included food and beverage stalls
- Creating a ticket booth for selling theater tickets
- Building a restaurant with the end goal of adding public activity to the area, eventually flushing out unwanted peoples and their undesirable activities

This process took seven years and was funded by both public and private resources. It helped to fund park maintenance, temporary kiosks, and a variety of public events ranging from historical park tours to concerts. The BPRC aided in reducing the crime by 92 percent, while doubling the number of annual visitors at the park.

As the new developments and improvements within the park started to attract more users and people venturing into the park, the drug dealing did not stop and only increased. It was made clear that it would take more than a simple redesign to draw citizens back into the park. But, today Bryant Park remains one of the highest used and best maintained parks of the urban parks in America due to the combination of design changes and a new management program made innovative (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018).

Fig. 12: Bryant Park, NY with a vast number of users, variation of seating areas, and large walkways (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.).

The main takeaway from New York has to do with the redesign of a popular space, and how it ultimately improved the space, but the crime returned. Even though the right steps were taken towards achieving that goal, the crime eventually continued. It is important to note that just because redesign takes place and problem areas are deduced, it does not always lead to complete eradication of the problem. It is simply human nature to continue to contribute to the original issue, no matter the improvements, additions, or redesigns, especially if the area continues to be popular for all users.

Summer Night Lights—Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles is at the top of California's list for gang-related violent crimes, and California is the state with the largest gang presence. The parks and recreation areas in poor neighborhoods tend to be the more frequented areas of gang clashes and violence, often increasing during summer months. Summer Night Lights (SNL) was adopted by community leaders as a strategy to help make families and children feel safe from the violence happening around their homes and neighborhoods. The challenge that Los Angeles faced could be found in the approach that was traditionally used when dealing with gang violence. The city put a heavy emphasis on policing and physical separation of rival gangs, but even though there was some success it was getting expensive and took valuable time away from the police. So, Mayor Antonia Villaraigosa along with the Gang Reduction and Youth Development office worked together to implement parks programming as a new approach to countering gang violence.

Summer Night Lights program worked to add these rules and activities to the parks in high-crime areas:

- Extending nighttime hours in eight parks in poor neighborhoods, keeping lights on until midnight
- Sponsoring movie nights and family-oriented activities four nights a week

Since 2008, Saturday Night Lights has gone from eight to twenty-four parks citywide, which has led to a 57 percent reduction of gang-related homicides in the neighborhoods Saturday Night Lights worked in. While the program was running, only one gang-related homicide in the area took place, compared to the seven that took place just the year before in 2007.

The Summer Night Lights program was doubled in size by the city the following year in 2009 due to the positive results. The budget tripled and the city hired 160 new staff members to help keep the program running. The crime rates continued to decrease. The cost of the program was around $5.4 million, with around half of that was provided by private donors, and the other half by public sources. Because of the empowerment this program provided to the communities and its ability to target the traditionally violent summer months, Summer Night Lights is known as a national model for violence reduction (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018).

*Fig. 13 & 14: F*lyers from the Summer Night Lights programs in Los Angeles (left) and Sacramento (right) listing locations that their free events/activities are taking place (Summer Night Lights, 2019).

In Los Angeles, it is crucial to understand the different that even small community efforts can make on well-used spaces. Because the gang violence created a large problem area in the city, a program was able to come up with two simple and affordable solutions that inevitably set the bar for safety improvements and crime prevention. There was no redevelopment or redesign of the physical environment to reduce crime, but the rules and activities were altered to create a disadvantage towards the offenders. The program started as something small but grew into a device that planners can use as a violence reduction model going into the future.

Village Green Park—Macon, Georgia

The Village Green community is a lower-income, racially diverse area within the city of Macon that was built in the 1960s and 70s. When housing was under construction, the only areas set aside for parks and recreation consisted of two spaces totaling a little less than two acres. These parks were intended as recreation space for the entire Village Green Community. The challenges this community faced included abandoned buildings, crime, drugs, and gang activity. Due to the park locations being unideal, the access remained limited because of the narrow spaces and easements next to existing houses surrounding the parks. This ultimately made the parks unappealing and underutilized within the community.

There were beautification efforts made to increase park use which added:

- Picnic shelters, tables, and grills
- A new playground unit
- New basketball courts

Because of these additions and other park beautification efforts, the park use went up 25 percent. The park and recreation department partnered with the police athletic league and helped in sponsoring athletic programs in the park. The neighborhood watch groups coordinated with the police precinct of Village Green, and now citizens are actively participating in their community by volunteering their time at the precinct to answer phone calls and complete other tasks.

Community involvement is critical in all efforts to help reduce crime and increase safety, especially in public spaces like local parks. The planning and programming efforts of the community go to help maintain these open spaces. In this case, the community in Macon, Georgia, the government, and nonprofit organizations all worked together to use a City Parks Forum grant to revive the Village Green Park as crime prevention. Now the citizens of the community care more about their neighborhood, while the incidents of crime and violence have decreased by more than 50 percent (National Recreation and Park Association, 2018).

This study in Georgia varied more than New York and Los Angeles because of the efforts put forth by the community in the form of beautification. There were no programs involved to help reduce the crime. This study was important to include because of the approach taken. Community involvement is extremely important because it shows the dedication people can have towards a particular something in their area. Beautification projects such as these that are undertaken by residents allows them to grow closer to their neighborhood, while providing piece of mind knowing they made an effort to make their community safer.

KEY FINDINGS

The park system is a glue that helps to bind communities together. Through smart, well thought out planning and maintenance of the parks, consumers can continue to feel safe utilizing these resources. The continuation of diversity and culture in communities help to create healthy and livable cities, parks, and neighborhoods.

Recommendations

An aspect of using design to increase safety that can pose difficulties is incorporating the CPTED principles into a park district. For example, it is easier to break the steps down into more achievable segments so there is no approach in trying to fix all the park's issues at one time. The key is finding a balance between desire for seclusion and safety (Cannavino, 2016). The way that users enjoy a park must be taken into consideration because if trees are removed to create an open sightline, the users who preferred reconnecting with nature consider the connection severed. Another issue that can be encountered is the funding. A lot of park districts lack funds for large projects, but there are other ways to achieve goals.

A recommendation that would best be applied to the cities themselves would be policy updates and implementation. General plans help to provide cities or counties a guideline for future developmental goals and in doing so they set the bar for growth in communities. The elements required in a general plan are land use, housing, circulation, conservation, noise, safety, open space, and environmental justice (added as of 2016). Through the safety and conservation elements, calling for certain policies that help in developing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan would identify specific requirements that need to be met, have the city work towards prioritizing the safety of their public spaces, and increase the standards for park maintenance regarding facilities, landscaping, and amenities. This type of update would increase the overall feeling of safety within users.

Getting creative is a common and affordable way to incorporate local talent and artists. When it comes to issues such as graffiti in a certain area, reaching out to local artists can help revitalize the area to become more artistically appropriate for the space. They can create a mural using their own supplies, and the end result is a sense of pride, a positive environment, and a feeling of investment that goes along with the improved conditions.

Fig. 15: Chicano Park in San Diego, CA shows a positive improvement in a concrete jungle through art (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, n.d.).

Using and involving the community is another great way to get more people on board and involved with projects. Most communities have a nonprofit group dedicated to the stability and future of their community. Many organizations are willing to help with generating revenue through grants of fundraising, so allowing their involvement keeps everyone engaged and exited for the future.

Lastly, cultivating sponsors and donors is a good way to inform the community of future projects, plans, and changes. Local companies or even private donors are always looking for ways to stay involved and give back to their communities. For example, if revitalization of a picnic area that potential donors use often is in the plans, they would likely help to fund the project. It is a great way to remind people why they love the park in the first place and provides incentives towards preservation of the space.

Community Involvement

To further the understand the importance of any urban park, there needs to be a discussion involving the concepts behind place, sense of place, and place-making. Place simply just refers to a location, but it is much more than that because a place can acquire significance. Without a sense of place, there is less investment in the location. People will begin to see it just as a space with no meaning or value that is personal to them. Place-making is a model developed by the Project for Public Spaces in the United States, and the Commission for Architecture in the United Kingdom. It is a community organizing process that involves local people who aid in the design and planning of the environment, leading to a positive sense of place (Hilborn, 2009). Knowing how place, place making, and having a positive sense of

place affects public spaces in communities is important in understanding why park safety is important for crime prevention, but also in a general sense of safety.

Project for Public Spaces believes that communities could be built around places with the idea that a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region, placemaking is what will inspire people to reimagine and reinvent public spaces to become hearts of communities. By strengthening the connection of people and the place they live, placemaking becomes a collaborative process which citizens can shape the public realm to maximize the value of the space. Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use that pays attention to physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and its evolution (Project for Public Spaces, 2006). Project for public spaces continues to lead by example in placemaking. They show that by adopting a collaborative community process because it is the most effective approach for creating and revitalizing public spaces (Project for Public Spaces, 2006).

Placemaking is both a process and philosophy centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who work, live, and play in a particular space in order to better understand the community as a whole. It is important to remember that placemaking belongs to everyone. The message and mission behind it is bigger than any one individual or organization.
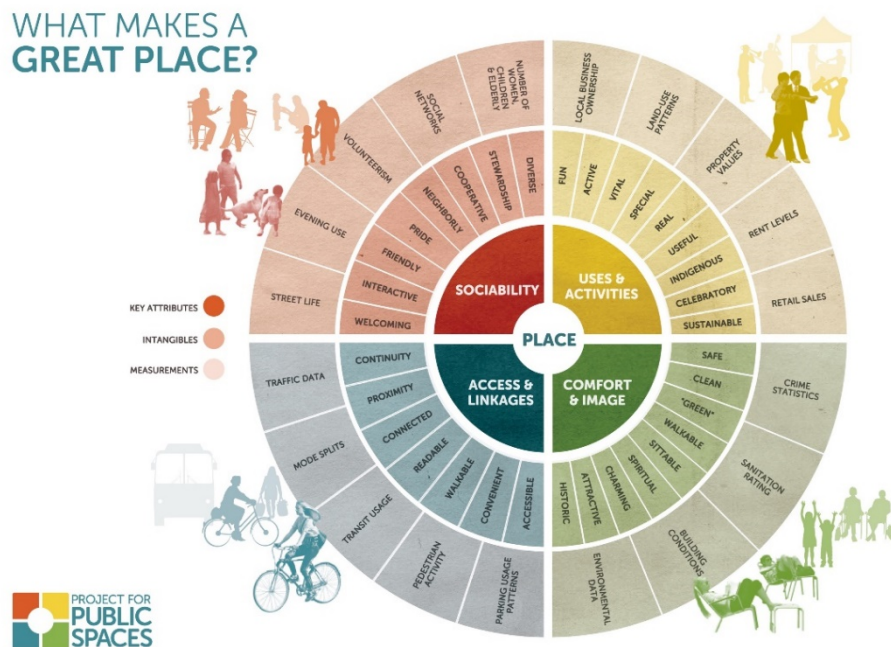

Fig. 16: The Place Diagram is a tool that Project for Public Spaces developed to help communities evaluate places. The inner ring represents key attributes, the middle ring is intangible qualities, and outer ring is measurable data (Project for Public Spaces, 2006).

Local advocacy groups are key leaders within communities and some still argue that recent private-public agreements regarding local governments reinvestments in park maintenance and staffing does not adequately represent the local community's interests. Some of the agreements have given interests to control over the park and restricted the locals' use of the park (Hilborn, 2009).

There are lots of resources and guides on how to deal with park related problems, but here are some questions that communities could ask regarding park maintenance and staffing:

- Does city management and police see the importance of early detection and intervention?
- Will the city ensure that there are sufficient resources and staffing?
- Will the police allocate the necessary resources to policing the park?

These questions revolve around gathering the necessary information to move forward in getting what the local community is advocating for in their parks.

Informing and Educating

From a police standpoint, the key to reducing crime and disorder in urban parks is for police to engage the local community in all stages of the problem-solving process, to ensure that:

1) There will be dominant legal use of the park, and
2) That local community members will act as natural guardians.

Police need to understand the balance between the demands of local politicians, city officials, urban planners, park department personnel, and deal with different advocacy groups, while also listening to the local community concerns and hopes for the park. When police involve the local community in the reduction of crime and disorder in a park, they are engaged in a problem-solving process that is specific to a time and place. It also promotes community safety and strength. The result is an immediate crime reduction and a lasting benefit to the community. There is also evidence that if people have access to a safe space, there will be less crime and disorder in the area (Hilborn, 2009).

A Community Toolbox sees a partnership between community's members and policy makers in order to bring about positive social change, and there are two perspectives:

1) Policymaker Perspective—how to use the social planning process to create policy that achieves its goals with the best results for the community and policymakers.
2) Grassroots Perspective—how to approach policymakers at the beginning of the process, so those in the community affected by policy change can participate in planning and implementing.

(Community Tool Box, n.d.).

These two perspectives offer ways for members to decide the ways they want to get involved, while making sure that goals are effectively addressed and will eventually be carried out.

Helping To Take Back a Park: A Concerned Citizen's Guide

Be patient; reaching the "tipping point" takes time.
It can take time and lots of hard work before an abandoned park reaches the "tipping point," where it shifts from being frightening and dangerous to safe and full of life. At some point, there will be a critical mass of positive activity, and the "feel" of the park will shift. Don't give up if it doesn't happen right away.

Don't put yourself in danger.
Drug dealers and other criminals who inhabit your park can be dangerous. Don't unnecessarily risk your safety by confronting them directly. There are many other effective strategies for making your park safer.

Don't go it alone.
Your police precinct is your most important resource for fighting crime, but developing relationships with the police takes time and work. Get to know the beat cops, your precinct's community affairs officer, and your precinct's commander. Go to the monthly meeting of your local police precinct community council, and let them know about the issues that matter to you.

Be the "eyes and ears" of the police.
Neither the police nor the park enforcement patrol can be in your park all the time. You can help by reporting any problems you see. The more you report problems, the more likely the police are to help you, as their distribution of resources is determined by the number of complaints they receive. You should also report problems about parks by calling 311, the city's information line, at any time.

Be specific about the problems.
Look for patterns and report them. Is there a particular time when kids hang out, when people sell or use drugs, or when dealers walk their pit bulls? Are there "regulars" who make trouble? More details make it easier for the police and park enforcement patrol to focus on the problem people, times, and places.

Get on the agenda.
Go to every monthly meeting of your local police precinct community council. Bring others with you. There is no better way for the police to know about the issues that matter to you. Also attend meetings of your community board's parks committee, and of local block, tenants, and merchants associations. Don't forget elected officials, too.

Think about organizing a safety committee/patrol.
When done properly, having a group focused on safety issues and/or a patrol can prove a good supplement. But you must organize such groups carefully, and in full consultation with the park enforcement patrol and the police, if they're to be successful and appropriate.

Source: Adapted from *Partnerships for Parks,* a joint program of the City Parks Foundation and the New York City Parks & Recreation Department.[12]

Fig. 17: This "Concerned Citizen's Guide" stems from the importance to be a natural guardian. Natural Guardians help to ensure park safety but are ordinary citizens whose presence reminds potential offenders that someone is noticing (Hilborn, 2009).

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