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Reflections on developments in urban security across europe over the last 30 years: trends and enduring tensions

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Abstract

This article reflects on the learning, developmental trends and research evidence accumulated over the last 30 years in relation to crime prevention and urban safety in Europe, with a particular focus on urban policies and city-level strategies delivered through multi-sectoral partnerships. Intrinsically, it focuses on commonalities rather than divergences. It draws on an international review of urban security research, interventions, policies and practices conducted as part of a European Horizon 2020 project entitled *Innovative Approaches to Urban Security* (IcARUS). Scoping reviews of interventions in four focus areas – preventing juvenile delinquency, preventing organised crime and trafficking, preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism, and the design and management of public spaces - were supplemented by interviews with international experts at the forefront of shaping the knowledge base during the period. Here, consideration is given to some broad trends, trajectories, persisting fault-lines and recurring challenges that feature over time and across jurisdictions. Despite divergent pathways, uneven developments and country-specific programmes that reflect political, cultural, legal/constitutional and economic differences, broad trends and developments are discernible. Against a backdrop of changes in the nature and level of crime and insecurity, the emergence of new harms and significant innovations in digitalisation and technologies, these include the growing importance of design features, place-based interventions, problem-oriented approaches, partnership relations, user engagement and gender implications. Finally, a number of enduring tensions that have restricted progress are explored including institutional responsibility for prevention, data sharing and the dissonance between the research knowledge base and contemporary policy and practice.

Keywords: Crime prevention, Urban security, Public space, Partnerships, Research/Policy nexus

Reflections on developments in urban security across europe over the last 30 years: trends and enduring tensions

1. Introduction

The latter part of the twentieth century saw pioneering initiatives that firmly placed urban safety on the policy agenda of city authorities across Europe. Where crime prevention and urban security had been assumed the sole responsibility of the (national state) police, a new approach emerged that embraced a pluralised and multilateral logic. From the early establishment of the Swedish National Crime Prevention Council (Brå) in 1975, the first in the world and the landmark Bonnemaïson report (1982) that shaped the French approach, through the influential work of the Home Office Research and Planning Unit in the 1980s and the Morgan Report (1991) in the UK, to the *Città sicure* programme in Italy (Selmini, 2004; 2005), the new millennium heralded a new thinking and infrastructure to deliver what Tuck (1988) described as a major 'shift in paradigm'. This 'preventive turn' in crime control policy was intimately tied to a 'new mode of governing crime' defined, at the time, by Garland (2001) as a 'de-differentiated' response that is not compartmentalised but affords a generalised activity built into the routines and consciousness of all citizens and organisations. This novel approach recognised that the levers and causes of crime lie far from the traditional reach of the criminal justice system. It acknowledged that there is no single agency solution to crime, which is multifaceted in both its causes and effects. Furthermore, it recognised the need for responses to crime that reflect its multiple aetiology; allowing for holistic approaches that are 'problem-focused' rather than 'bureaucracy-premised' and affording the potential co-ordination and pooling of expertise, information and resources (Crawford, 1997). Much has been learned across the interconnected fields of crime prevention, community safety and urban security in terms of the scholarly knowledge base and 'what works', policy development and professional practice (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh and MacKenzie, 2002; Crawford, 2009). Collectively, these now constitute a loosely defined domain where divergent disciplines and organisational interests coalesce, as exemplified by the focus in research and policy on city-level municipal authorities as the multi-stakeholder delivery mechanisms for joined-up approaches to the prevention of crime, harm and vulnerability (Tilley, 2009; Selmini, 2010).

This article reflects on broad developments and trends in urban safety across Europe over the last 30 years or so. Intrinsically, it focuses on commonalities rather than divergences across countries. It draws on an international review of the English language research literature (published since 1992) conducted as part of a European Com-

mission funded Horizon 2020 research project *IcARUS: Innovative Approaches to Urban Security* (Crawford, Donkin and Weirich, 2022). Scoping reviews of interventions in four focus areas – preventing juvenile delinquency, preventing organised crime and trafficking, preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism, and the design and management of public spaces – were supplemented by interviews with urban security practitioners (n=18) in the six cities engaged in the IcARUS project (Lisbon, Nice, Riga, Rotterdam, Stuttgart and Turin) and key international experts (n=19) who have been at the forefront of shaping the knowledge base and invested in the application of research in multi-sectoral practices. Interview material is used selectively throughout to illustrate some of the arguments and viewpoints presented¹.

A recurring theme that runs throughout centres around why – despite the intense early innovations in theory and practice inaugurated in the 1980s and 1990s – crime prevention has **not** become a more central feature in the governance of crime and urban safety. While preventive healthcare practice, by contrast, has advanced profoundly over the equivalent period, the same cannot be said of crime prevention policy and urban security practices. Moreover, the hesitant and uneven 'preventive turn' and growth in urban security over the last three decades has coincided with the historic international decline in aggregate crime rates, notably in traditional offences. This trend is mirrored across jurisdictions and cannot simply be traced to country-specific causal factors. When asked about key changes over the last 30 years, British criminologist, Ken Pease noted in interview:

The most significant change is the global crime drop... The second is the migration of crime from physical space to cyberspace. This is important for many reasons, of which two of the most important are first that until now offenders had to find their victims. Now 'phishing' means that victims find themselves. Send 1,000 messages and the ten who answer are your victims. The second reason is that policing based on territorially-defined areas of responsibility is increasingly irrelevant, with the obvious implications for enforcement.

While the extent of the crime drop may be contested (Matthews, 2016), notably given the growth of cyber-en-

1 Interview data cited in this article are drawn from the IcARUS Review (Crawford, Donkin and Weirich, 2022), which also includes details of interviewees and methodology; available at <https://www.icarus-innovation.eu/d2-1-the-changing-face-of-urban-security-research-a-review-of-accumulated-learning/>

abled crime (Levi, 2017), there is little doubt that preventive interventions have played a role in this historic turnaround in aggregate crime rates in relation to traditional property crimes and public offending (Farrell, Tseloni, Mailley and Tilley, 2011; Farrell, Tilley and Tseloni, 2014). However, despite this apparent 'success', crime prevention remains under-resourced, poorly implemented and little championed politically (Waller, 2013; 2019). In part, this may be attributed to a 'measurement paradox' in that urban security interventions often suffering a lack of observability. It is both difficult to evaluate preventive interventions and hard to communicate the success of prevention. There are evident challenges associated with measuring and quantifying prevention as a 'non-event' – something that does not actually occur. Additionally, the desired outcome or preventive effect may be distant in time. Hence, the relative advantage or benefit of prevention are often delayed, deferred and diluted. Reflecting on progress across the years, Canadian criminologist, Irvin Waller noted in interview:

We are left wondering why we cannot implement measures that we know will work, reduce crime, and cost less for law and order... The most important conceptual insight is that politicians talk about prevention but do not do it, in part because they are not familiar with the evidence and in part because they are overly influenced by the special interests of police, lawyers and prisons.

As a result, communicating the successes of crime prevention and the effectiveness of early interventions in ways that elicit long-term political commitment and organisational change remains an enduring challenge. In the absence of necessary political leadership, appropriate levels of resources and institutional commitment from relevant stakeholders remain limited. Nonetheless, significant advances have been made. Let us first consider some of the key findings from the IcARUS Review before highlighting a number of developmental trends and persistent tensions across the period.

2. Key Findings

2.1 Design, Innovation and Public Space

There has long been recognition that occurrence and placement of crime can be influenced by situational measures through modifications to the immediate physical environment (Clarke, 1995). Furthermore, history reminds us that much prevention serves largely as an attempt to 'retrofit' solutions to novel criminal opportunities that are created by technologies and social change. The great aspiration at the heart of the 'paradigm shift' that Tuck (1988) and others heralded some 35 years ago was that anticipation and incremental experimentation would be routinely built into the design of new technologies, services and products. Realising this aspiration, however, has proved problematic. It has met cultural and institutional

obstacles, including a reluctance to embrace experimentation and organisational learning within the public sector and from commercial logics within the private sector – where crime consequences often constitute a relatively small business imperative. The design of motor vehicle security and the subsequent decrease in vehicle-related crime is a notable example, albeit one that took considerable governmental leverage to effect change (Maxfield and Clarke, 2004). Anticipating the potential criminogenic opportunities generated by technological innovations, designs and urban planning was supposed to inform the logic of the UK Crime and Disorder Act 1998, by requiring local authorities to take anticipated crime consequences into consideration when making policy decisions². Yet, despite being initially lauded as a radical advance in preventive urban security planning (Moss and Pease, 1999), the legislation has been little used across the subsequent decades. According to Moss (2010, p. 251), implementation has been "at best, lukewarm and at worst, nonexistent".

Nonetheless, there has been a growing appreciation that design modifications to the built environment and public spaces of cities can foster urban security. Dating back to Jane Jacobs' pioneering critique of urban planning, it had long been recognised that place-based features of local community and "the intricate, almost unconscious networks of voluntary controls and standards" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 32) influence crime and urban safety. Subsequently, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) (Jeffery 1971), Secured by Design and 'defensible space' theories (Newman, 1972) have all offered important insights that have informed practical measures. In resultant years, the influence of the CPTED principles of natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement, maintenance and management have been considerable and wide-ranging, particularly with regard to security in public spaces. These have informed diverse design interventions to address a range of security problems. The use of CPTED principles had become widespread by the mid-2000s, being used in numerous countries, and endorsed by the European Union through its European Committee for Standardization, which sought to provide a handbook for EU members (Davey and Wootton, 2016).

All of these developments drew the design, regulation and management of public spaces into sharper focus. In their application, however, some of these CPTED principles and 'defensible space' theories with overt surveillance as deterrence have been interpreted and implemented in overly crude ways, resulting in a tendency to prioritise security outcomes at the expense of other values and benefits of public spaces; be they social, cultural,

2 Section 17 of the 1998 Act imposed a duty on local authorities, in exercising their various functions, to consider the crime and disorder implications of any new policies and the need to do all that they reasonably could to prevent crime and disorder in their area.

environmental, educational or health-related. This has seen the securitisation and sanitisation of public spaces, often paying insufficient attention to aesthetics and the impact on public perceptions. One of the deep ironies of some urban security interventions through environmental design has been that in their implementation overt forms of security can foster perceptions of insecurity by alerting citizens to potential risks and heightening sensibilities. Vulnerability-led design responses or too great an emphasis on security can promote fear of crime and insecurity, with adverse implications for wellbeing.

Across jurisdictions, there has been a propensity to prefer technological solutions – often hardware – as opposed to human solutions in addressing security concerns, with less regard for the intersection and interaction between social and technological processes. The most evident example has been the use of CCTV in public spaces. A large swathe of research has shown that CCTV has been implemented too indiscriminately with insufficient regard to the benefits, outcomes, costs and their sustainability within specified contexts. When used as an independent prevention element, CCTV seems to lack any particularly effective results. Reflecting on developments across European cities over the years, Elizabeth Johnston – Director of the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)³ – commented in interview:

One of the most important lessons for us - but I'm not sure that it's been translated back into policy - is the fact that CCTV and technology in general has been evaluated and its relevance and effectiveness have been shown to be limited to certain cases and certain situations, which has been very useful for those who have been reading the research. But, has that lesson been totally taken on? No! Clearly not, so there's a discrepancy... One of the lessons we can take away from research is that it's saying the effectiveness is obviously not proven in the ways that we're still currently using CCTV.

By contrast, research has highlighted the value of compliance strategies that decentre the police and engage informal actors, civil society mediators and forms of persuasion, self-regulation and capacity building, rather than resort to coercive law enforcement, police, prosecution and punishment. By putting the community back into public space, a sense of ownership and guardianship over the space can emerge. Popular activities placed at the heart of empty public spaces can reclaim the space for legitimate users and foster perceptions of safety. In turn, this can increase natural surveillance and hence the risk of detection of criminal and undesirable activities. The challenge is how public spaces, as places that accommodate and welcome a diversity of use, can remain welcoming and lightly regulated through mechanisms that engage users and beneficiaries alike.

The inappropriateness of overly-securitised design interventions in public spaces was most acutely felt and acknowledged in the design and regulatory strategies first implemented in privately-owned 'quasi-public' spaces – such as shopping malls, amusement parks, recreational facilities, etc. – where commercial logics frequently take precedence over overt securitisation (Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Crawford, 2011). Resultantly, many cities have witnessed a cross-fertilisation of security interventions from the commercial sector into municipal strategies, whereby through a 'process of naturalisation' regulation has become embedded into the physical infrastructure and social routines in ways that are less noticeable, more aesthetically pleasing and unthreatening. The balance between security concerns and other public goods or private pursuits was an early lesson learned in the business and retail sector where security concerns often clashed with commercial imperatives. As Braithwaite (2003) highlights there is a very different history of policing and prevention to be derived from the business regulatory field as distinct from the 'police-prisons' arena. In this vein, some time ago, I noted: "*In reality, both criminology and government policy were relative late-comers to a preventive way of thinking*" (Crawford, 2007, pp. 900-901).

Hence, there remained a tension between the priority accorded to crime prevention and security against other benefits, uses and values, notably with regard to the dangers of over-securitisation of public spaces (Cozens and Love, 2017). Hence, so-called 'second generation CPTED' sought to integrate concepts of social organisation, 'collective efficacy' and community development to redress the imbalance with opportunity reduction in physical places. It also sought to include principles of political economy, community connectedness and cultural diversity that were too often ignored in earlier applications. A preoccupation with technological fixes to urban security problems increasingly became tempered by this broadening of the design focus. More generally, the language of 'security', with its future-orientation and preventive implications, increasingly came to influence urban governance and local safety policies, in part bolstered by the increased role of the private sector in municipal preventative partnerships.

Urban public space has become the crucible in which much of the politics of safety is played out and enacted. For city managers and civic leaders, the quality and use of public space - in which security and perceptions of safety play a fundamental part - has become a defining feature of the identity and promotion of European cities. From a focus on safer nightlife and the presentation of cities as safe places for visitors, investors and businesses, security has become a defining feature of the urban economy and city marketing. Concerns over political violence and threats of terrorism have added to this trend. So too – in a very different way – the Covid-19 pandemic reinforced the salience of locality and importance of public space and citizens' relation to it.

For some, the securitisation of public space has be-

3 See: <https://efus.eu/>

come a new frame for managing political conflict, poverty and the visible manifestations of social inequality. In interview, Rossella Selmini asserted:

I think there is a stronger and stronger connection in terms of terminology, definitions, priorities, policies, etc., between urban security and the control of political dissent. It is as if the control of public spaces is now merging... At the same time, you are using the same type of tools and rules to control protests in public space as with controlling the poor immigrants from begging on the corner. The “old” matter of poverty marginality has shifted toward control of political dissent, and the connection is public space.

Urban public spaces are inevitably contested places infused with different and competing economic, social and organisational interests, where commercial and business imperatives converge with moral claims over appropriate behaviour and conditions of citizenship. Concerns about the limitations of criminal justice and the ineffectiveness of penal sanctions have also fostered a blurring of administrative/civil and criminal orders and regulations (Selmini and Crawford, 2017). This has seen a growing resort to administrative regulation and civil laws (or quasi-civil laws such as anti-social behaviour regulation), as means of effecting and implementing crime prevention and urban security. It has also prompted the creative use of administrative sanctions in responding to organised crime and trafficking, by disrupting the business models and underlying structures of organisation (Huisman and Nelen, 2007).

2.2 Community Engagement and the (En)gendering of urban security

Recent years have seen greater emphasis given to the importance of community engagement and recognition of citizens as co-producers of security. This has highlighted the diversity of uses, experiences and expectations of public spaces and security interventions. This has raised fundamental questions not only about the relationship between public services and citizens but also about expertise and the appropriate knowledge that should inform programme innovation. It has re-centred design and implementation around an intervention's beneficiaries and users rather than the interests of funding authorities and designers. This has fostered new ways of collecting relevant information to inform security interventions. Commencing with the birth of victimisation surveys, diverse mechanisms have been deployed to seek to elicit insights from citizens and local user-groups. Reflecting on early developments, Dutch criminologist Jan van Dijk, a key early proponent of victimisation surveys, commented in interview:

I think symbolically when you do a victimisation survey, you break the monopoly of the police on the topic. In the old days, they were the ones who collected the statis-

tics and manipulated them. So, it was totally within their universe. When you have victimisation survey data, you changed the rules of the game... So, I see the victimisation survey, more than I did in the past, as an extremely important tool in the democratisation process.

Increased recognition of the need to engage populations that are the targets of interventions as active co-producers and agents of change rather than as passive recipients of services has fostered human-centred approaches to design and implementation that are sensitive to local context and the nature of social interactions therein. Nonetheless, this remains very much a work in progress, particularly with regard to local beneficiaries and users. South African Director of Fixed, Barbara Holtmann, noted in interview:

Lived experience is very often ignored. When it comes to crime statistics, the reality in most communities is that you can tell people they are safe until you are blue in the face, but if they don't experience it or perceive it to be true, it doesn't matter. So, there needs to be a much bigger conversation about how we value different kinds of data, because that will influence the way we capture data and what we do with the data.

Across the years, victimisation survey findings and other mechanisms of engagement with beneficiaries and users have also highlighted the differential use and experiences of security and space among diverse groups, as well as across different parts of cities. Recognition that crime and harm are both socially and spatially concentrated and that they compound other forms of social disadvantages and vulnerabilities has highlighted the considerable gender differences in both perceptions and experiences of crime and victimisation.

In many ways, much of the knowledge base concerning the prevention of crime and insecurity has traditionally been constructed in relation to male offending and risks presented largely by male activities. So too, urban security responses have largely been delivered by male-dominated institutions and organisations. In more subtle ways, some of the assumptions that have informed broad theories – such as rational choice and routine activity theories – have frequently posited an implicit male ‘autonomous individual’ as its assumed foundation. Across time, the growing focus on victims of crime, fear of crime and the adverse impact of perceptions of insecurity introduced a decidedly gendered understanding of urban security in ways that challenged the dominant male focus and related gendered assumptions. Consequently, there has been a growing importance of gender in framing urban security in terms of both the lived experiences of security and the production of safety, notably in relation to the use and quality of public spaces and domestic abuse as a community issue (Stanko, 1990; Ceccato and Nalla, 2020). In interview, Caroline Davey noted:

Obviously, gender is a big factor in terms of offending behaviour. It's also a factor in terms of the victims of of-

fences. And there are gender differences related to feelings of insecurity. But there's also a gender dimension in terms of the types of solutions that are preferred. There is research highlighting the fact that the focus on technology solutions – or on more aggressive interventions – is something that's coming from a more masculine perspective. There's a need for a different approach to security that is more understanding of human beings – more connected to their experiences, to their feelings. So, gender is really something that runs through the security domain – from the design of public space, through the use of urban environments to offending behaviour.

Most notably, there are significant gender differences with regard to perceptions of safety in public spaces across Europe. Over time, there have been some improvements, as measured by the European Social Survey, since 2002/3 (when the survey first ran). Throughout Europe, overall feelings of safety have generally improved for both genders but women remain between 2.5 and 5.7 times more likely to feel unsafe than men in almost all countries (Fitzgerald, 2021). Overall gender differences remain stubbornly persistent. Consequently, new approaches are now being advocated the design of public spaces – such as urban parks – that incorporate an explicit gender dimension (The Safer Parks Consortium, 2023), although these remain few and far-between.

3. Key Trends and Tensions

Let us now consider a number of paradoxes, highlighting key trends and enduring tensions borne out by the IcARUS Review. Here, I focus on three inter-related issues – problem-oriented processes, the limitations of a 'what works' approach and data exchange – all with implications for multi-sectoral partnership working and responsibility.

3.1 Problem-oriented approaches

There has been a gradual, hesitant and, in many senses, reluctant recognition of the importance of applying 'process models' of problem-solving that seek to tailor responses to the context of local problems and populations, rather than applying 'off the shelf' universal solutions. Initially elaborated in relation to policing by Herman Goldstein (1979; 1990) in the US over fifty years ago, problem-oriented methodologies have provided robust process-based frameworks through which to specify and better understand the nature of given crime and security problem and guide practitioners towards better-quality interventions and their implementation. In essence, problem-oriented approaches challenge public authorities to: identify specific problems; engage in structured efforts to better understand the underlying causes that generate these problems using a wide range of relevant data, information sources and analytical techniques; think creatively about the most appropriate response to prevent or miti-

gate a given problem by involving partners who are affected by or responsible for the problem; and, assess the impact of implemented measures.

Tailoring interventions to particular issues and contexts, problem-solving approaches highlight the key processes involved. They are encapsulated by the SARA model that incorporates scanning, analysis, response and assessment (Eck and Spelman, 1987) and the '5Is' framework of intelligence, intervention, implementation, involvement and impact (Ekblom, 2011). Collectively, they foster approaches that work outwards from defining the specific crime or security problem, engaging with the end-users and beneficiaries of an intervention as the basis for a more effective approach that builds context, implementation and evaluation into the intervention design from the outset.

Yet, as Bullock, Sidebottom, Laycock and Tilley (2022a) have shown, the implementation and adoption of problem-oriented approaches in the context of policing has not followed a neat pattern of diffusion of innovation that might have been anticipated. Some European countries have neither embraced nor adopted a problem-solving approach. In jurisdiction where they have, cultural obstacles to fostering change at the frontline have been substantial, notably within the police (Chan, 2007). The unobservability that hinders much urban security and crime prevention interventions, as well as its complexity, has been notable, so too has the apparent incompatibility of problem-oriented approaches with prevailing norms and values of police organisations. Simply put, police lack a suitably receptive organisational culture and absorptive capacity to accommodate proactive problem-solving as opposed to reactive crime-fighting. Goldstein noted as much in 2018 at his acceptance of the Stockholm Prize for Criminology:

I have grown accustomed to viewing successful efforts to implement POP [Problem-Oriented Policing] – when carried out in all of its full dimensions – as episodic rather than systematic; as the results of relatively isolated cells of initiative, energy and competence. I view these pockets of achievement as exciting and pointing the way but sprinkled among a vast sea of police operations that remain traditional and familiar (Goldstein, 2018, p. 3).

Despite all the organisational and technological developments, which should have enabled greater progress, a genuinely problem-oriented approach remains stubbornly unfulfilled (see Bullock et al., 2022b). Gloria Laycock reflected in interview:

I think we've got a huge amount of knowledge about how to solve problems... And I think the police need to behave like engineers. They need to experiment. They need to try things. They need to see if they work or not. The trouble with police culture is they're not allowed to fail. And if you're experimenting, you are taking risks and you're risking failure. And there's a huge cultural reluctance to take risks for all sorts of understandable reasons.

Fostering an organisational culture that is open to experimentation and learning through experimentation remains challenging. This is true of other public services, not only the police. Some years ago, Ekblom and Pease (1995, p. 636) suggested that all those involved in the evaluation and design process “should move towards the willingness to fail and the readiness to learn from failure”. However, nearly thirty years on, there remains a pervasive fear of failure, a culture of risk aversion and trepidation of genuine experimentation.

Recurring operational barrier to implementation and delivery include weak scanning and analysis, an over-reliance on police data, responses that tend to emphasise traditional enforcement and poor evaluation of the impact and outcomes of specific interventions adopted (e.g. Scott, 2000; Goldstein, 2018). Reflecting on progress over the years, Nick Tilley commented in interview:

I still think that our efforts to understand local problems and draw on evidence in order to try and figure out strategic ways of responding is not really functioning as I'd hoped it would [over 25 years ago]. I'm pleased that it's still happening after a fashion, but disappointed, it's been so slow and disappointed that the development has been so uneven. I would have hoped for steady progress. If you think of the literature on diffusion of innovation you would expect there to be a slow take up, for things to take place slowly, then to be a rapid increase and then to plateau as adoption becomes almost universal. That has not happened in problem-oriented policing.

Evidence shows that problem-oriented approaches to policing and crime prevention «was often perceived to be highly complex to deliver, and required a great deal of maintenance and attention over time» (Bullock, Sidebottom, Laycock and Tilley, 2022a, p. 401). It was also difficult to evidence the impact of preventive problem-oriented (POP) approaches. A recent UK review of the impact of problem-oriented policing concluded: «despite extensive evidence for and endorsement of POP, it has not become the *modus operandi* of British policing» (Sidebottom et al., 2020, p. 4).

One of the key limitations that constrained the implementation of problem-oriented policing is that it has focused on problems that fall within the police remit from the perspective of the police organisation alone. This police-centric perspective recasts social problems as police problems and sees the locus of the response to those social problems through the lens of policing, yet the levers to the problems often lie far from the reach of the police. Hence, problem-oriented approaches in urban security demand an inter-organisational partnership approach involving a plurality of stakeholders and knowledgeable actors. The tendency of the police to ‘go it alone’ has stymied the adoption and routinisation of problem-based processes. As Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate and Kyriakidou (2004, p. 612) note in the context of health-care reform: “*The more complex the implementation that is needed for a particular innovation, the greater the signifi-*

cance of the inter-organisational network will be to the implementation's success”. Most urban security problems cut across the capabilities and know-how of diverse organisation, some for whom specific problems may only be a peripheral concern. Hence, securing their engagement will often be problematic. Harnessing the different competencies, responsibilities, resources and skills is an added burden.

3.2 The Limitations of ‘What Works’

The ‘what works’ movement in crime prevention and policing has played an important role in advancing the evidence base and in championing the value of researched policy and practice. It has helped foster a robust argument in support of the view that urban security practices would be substantially improved by more systematic attention to, and application of, evidence about the effects of strategies and interventions. However, the focus on outcome measurement and the methodologies associated with the ‘what works’ and evidence-based policing movements (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh and MacKenzie, 2002; Sherman, 1998) have tended to down-play the importance of implementation processes and context. They have preferred to emphasise assumed causal links between mechanisms (interventions) and outcomes patterns. The approach advocated tends to advance a narrow understanding of ‘evidence’ and ‘science’. It posits a clear hierarchy of knowledge informed by a ranking of methodologies with random control trials (RCTs) at its apex - epitomised by the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods (Sherman, 2009). Yet RCTs strip away the complexities of reality in an effort to isolate certain factors. Such contextual factors, however, may be central to a programme’s execution and impact. Whilst RCTs provide strong internal validity, they do not tell us much about whether we could replicate that intervention in another context (Hough, 2010). They embody a linear notion of causality. Yet for complex social phenomena, not only are causes multiple, but feedback loops may make them more circular in effect.

Consequently, there has been a tendency to search for universal solutions under the banner of ‘what works’. This has drawn attention away from the situated and contextualised features of local places. Furthermore, insufficient regard is accorded to which groups of people benefit from particular interventions or design features within specific contexts or settings at a given time. The ‘what works’ quest for generalisability and universal solutions, tends to fly in the face of and sit awkwardly with process-oriented and problem-based approaches. In interview, Paul Ekblom noted:

Preventive interventions have to be intelligently customised to problem and context; success stories cannot simply be copied cookbook-fashion. Intelligent replication requires a process that customises action to problem

and context. In this respect, replication will always involve some degree of innovation, trial, feedback and adjustment, whether minor or major. This, in turn, places requirements on the kind and format of knowledge that security practitioners possess, and the institutional context of implementation.

Urban security interventions involve intentional interaction within complex social systems. Differing groups, people and technologies interact with programme components in diverse ways. The human dimensions of implementation and programme reception are adaptive, resulting in changes to the intervention and how it is received, used and translated. There is inbuilt complexity in the chains of action, interaction, feedback and adaptation. As Greenhalgh et al. (2004, p. 615) note in relation to healthcare:

herein lies a paradox. Context and ‘confounders’ lie at the very heart of the diffusion, dissemination, and implementation of complex innovations. They are not extraneous to the object of study; they are an integral part of it. The multiple (and often unpredictable) interactions that arise in particular contexts and settings are precisely what determine the success or failure of a dissemination initiative.

The contribution of insights from realist evaluations has been vital in highlighting and advancing understandings of the interactions between context, mechanisms and configurations of outcome patterns (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2013). Realist methodologies provide a framework for thinking about features other than effect size. Crucially, they highlight theories of change and focus attention on factors too frequently ignored in the (notably quasi-experimental) research – namely context and implementation. Moreover, these features are precisely the kinds that are frequently central to the concerns and interests of policy-makers and practitioners. As Nick Tilley, a prominent promoter of realist evaluations, argued in interview:

‘What works’ is a terrible phrase because it’s an unspecified universal... I rail against the use of that kind of language because built into the phrase ‘what works’ is the unspoken ‘always and under all conditions’. I don’t believe there are many, if any, [interventions] where that holds. So, if I could wave my magic wand, I would always have discrete evaluations saying ‘this worked’. Findings of evaluations are always in the past tense. They are always: ‘this worked here, in this population’.

Building upon these realist insights, recent efforts have been given to developing ways to combine discussions of measurement effects and their size together with other dimensions of importance to practitioners and that enable us to assess the quality and applicability of evaluation evidence. A notable example is the EMMIE scale (Bowers, Tompson, Sidebottom, Bullock and Johnson, 2017), which seeks to provide evidence that equips policy-makers and practitioners with ‘actionable knowledge’ (Antona-

copoulou, 2007) in a format that helps users to access and understand the evidence quickly. It asserts that to provide a framework for learning from interventions, evaluations should provide evidence and information on all the following: the overall Effect direction and size – alongside significant unintended effects – of an intervention and the confidence that should be placed on that estimate; the Mechanisms or mediators activated by the intervention, policy or practice in question; the Moderators or contexts relevant to the production or non-production of intended and significant unintended effects of different sizes; the process of Implementation that highlights key sources of success and failure in implementing the intervention, policy or practice; and the Economic costs and benefits associated with the intervention, policy or practice (Johnson, Tilley and Bowers, 2015, p. 463). Developed in conjunction with the UK College of Policing, the EMMIE framework now informs the crime reduction toolkit, which provides a useful resource for practitioners⁴. In large part, the latter three elements all relate to external validity. However, the trouble remains that most robust research evaluations of crime prevention and security interventions today still do not apply a realist methodology and frequently tell us little, if anything, about factors such as context or implementation, let alone costs. This means that any review of the evaluation literature and certainly any meta-review of reviews, can only provide a partial account as the (scientific) knowledge base largely only focuses on only two of the five elements within the EMMIE framework. As such, the knowledge base shines a light more clearly on the relationship between interventions and outcome effects, and is much less revealing about the contexts, implementation or costs of interventions.

3.3 Data Sharing and the Dynamics of Partnership Working

It has long been recognised that in its design and implementation crime prevention and urban security interventions demand collaboration through multi-stakeholder responses and the police alone cannot prevent crime. However, delivering effective problem-oriented partnerships remains decidedly problematic (Berry, Briggs, Erol and van Staden, 2011; Crawford and Cunningham, 2015; Bullock et al., 2022b). Enduring challenges pertain to the pursuit of multi-stakeholder urban security networks through horizontal exchanges of shared information, knowledge, resources or other transactions that cut across vertical intra-organisational priorities, and which pay scant regard to the task of managing inter-organisational relations. Despite – or maybe because of – considerable advances enabled by digitalisation in the volume, variety and velocity of data and advances in data science methodologies and analytic capabilities – including victimisation

4 See <https://www.college.police.uk/research/crime-reduction-toolkit>

surveys and advanced quantitative techniques and visualisation – the quality and availability of data to inform robust intervention design, decision-making and evaluation remain problematic. Data sharing and data linkage are some of the most intractable and contentious aspects of urban security practice. A pervasive and deeply ingrained reluctance to share information between agencies persists, informed by technological, legal, organisational and cultural barriers to data exchange. Despite government guidance encouraging information sharing between organisations, the full benefit of data linkage and connected public sector administrative and routine data, remains an elusive goal.

Given the siloed nature of data and the different processes through which data are defined, collected and stored – as well as the variable quality of administrative data – the issue of data sharing and information exchange sits at the heart of urban security partnerships. Information exchange itself can be a source of conflict particularly in the context of crime control where information sharing is governed by complex rules and laws relating to sensitive data and privacy. Furthermore, there are problems of the non-interoperability of data across different organisational systems for data management. Nonetheless, good quality data enable the better understanding of the nature and distribution of local crime and disorder related problems, establish local problem profiles and produce a local strategy specifically aimed at preventing the problems.

Gloria Laycock noted in interview that: *“If you take the view that you’re trying to prevent crime on a problem-solving basis, then you need to be very clear on what the problem is, and that means you need data”*. Good quality data collection and sharing across relevant organisations, as well as ethically sensitive data management and use all allow for effective joined-up service provision. They afford opportunities for joint analysis and coordinated working between relevant agencies, provide the capacity to track and support individuals and families through service provision/diverse interventions and assess their trajectories. They also provide an evidence-base from which to assess effectiveness, ensure the best use of resources and afford opportunities to monitor performance and render services accountable. And yet progress on this front has been slow and disjointed.

One of the practical ways of overcoming problems with data sharing has been through the establishment of co-located multi-disciplinary teams, where interpersonal trust and denser reciprocal relations become key lubricants (Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2017). While, information exchange and informal working practices can provide a valuable basis for communication and negotiation, they come with certain risks. Hence, balanced information exchange also demands mutual understanding of the limits and legal constraints in which the sharing of sensitive data can be done ethically.

4. Concluding Reflections

Across time, there has been an uneven trajectory in the political fortunes of crime prevention and urban security influenced by exceptional events and the vagaries of political priorities, which has seen the ebb and flow of investments in prevention with a shifting focus as political priorities change. Narrow electoral horizons and short-termism continually serve to undermine the necessary investment in long-term preventive solutions and a fundamental shift away from traditional punitive responses to crime and harm. There also remain enduring and entrenched political demands for uniform and eye-catching solutions – ‘silver bullets’ – that can be applied, almost regardless of context or the nature of the specific problem. The IcARUS Review reveals a considerable discrepancy between the evolving knowledge base and contemporary urban security policy and practice.

One of the central challenges in synthesising the knowledge base is that most of the research has been written by and for researchers and has tended to focus on exploring narrow questions of internal validity and methodological robustness. Much of the research literature has reified the value of methodological rigour and advanced an unhelpfully rigid hierarchy of evidence. In its quest for ‘what works’, it has paid insufficient regard to the relational and process-based mechanisms that foster change. While the ‘what works’ movement has been important in fostering a robust evidence base, it has also, inadvertently, served to detach ‘evidence’ from the messy politics and complex realities of social relations, organisational interactions, cultural environments and situational dynamics into which crime prevention interventions must be implemented, enacted and brought to life. In its narrowing of the frame of relevance and stripping out complexity and interdependencies, the ‘what works’ approach has advanced what some have referred to as an ‘elite science’ (Sparrow, 2016), ignoring the role play by practitioners in giving life to interventions and the knowledge that they bring to the resultant effectiveness of interventions, as well as public perceptions. Yet, these stubborn features shape reality.

Consequently, there remain insufficient understandings of the ways in which social context shapes successful outcomes and the nature and extent to which particular preventive mechanisms are context-determined or context-dependent. This is not to argue the relativistic case that context is everything, but rather a need to balance place-based understandings of how contexts shape outcomes while drawing lessons from successfully evaluated interventions that afford replication, application and adaption from one place to another. As Frank Weerman noted in interview:

Research has become better because we adopted rigorous methods and experiments or quasi-experimental research. But we also lost something with that [focus] and that is looking at what’s happening and at the individuals involved. So one thing that might be very interesting

is to combine those two. So, on the one hand, we do experimental research and evaluate effects, but at the same time, we follow the people who are carrying out the interventions over time to see what's happening and follow how individuals experience interventions and prevention programmes and what they take from them.

The overwhelming lesson from the last 30 years is that the institutional context, social interactions and resistant organisational cultures have often undermined the implementation of research-informed urban security interventions. It is not that the science is inevitably poor – although it is certainly incomplete and in some places inadequate given shifting technological and social change – but rather it is not being implemented or implemented in inappropriate ways, circumstances and situations.

Combining lesson-learning from past evidence, problem-oriented processes and human-centred design efforts with realist insights into evaluation offers a more nuanced basis upon which to construct an enriched evidence base for future interventions. However, this will also demand a different approach to relations between key actors and agents in urban security; between the communities of research, policy and frontline practitioners. It also demands an appreciation that citizens are not merely passive recipients of services but are active co-producers of urban security and agents of change. In the face of modern security challenges, there is now as great a need as ever for urban security policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to combine their knowledge, expertise and insights in ways that engage directly with those people affected by urban security programmes. To do so, will demand recognition of the limitations and constraints of different partners' motivations, values and priorities in co-designing effective interventions. This will necessitate bringing together groups that frequently have markedly different priorities and interests, with the aim of working together towards mutually agreed, shared and long-term goals. At its core lies the goal of collaborative advantage that derives not simply from the combination of differing perspectives but also in framing and shaping questions, methodologies and outcomes differently. Hence, negotiating common purpose, forging shared priorities and ensuring appreciation of the divergent contributions of differing partners are all cornerstones for mature partnerships in the co-production of urban security (Crawford, 2020).

Certainly, the last 30 years have witnessed a greater mutual recognition across these different professional sectors often forged through greater partnership working. There remains considerable scope for further collaborations that engage researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and administrators on the ground in the processes of place-based mutual learning, knowledge generation, programme co-design and implementation of the kind that the IcARUS project is advancing⁵. City governments and

municipal authorities, given the breadth of their competencies and their role as local anchor institutions, have a vital role to play in harnessing these coalitions for change in ways that break free from the straight-jacket of narrow, self-interested governmental thinking and inter-professional rivalries. As Irvin Waller noted in interview: “*National systems like policing or education are siloed, whereas local governments are much closer to the outcomes and have a joint interest in a city or neighbourhood being better*”. City authorities are also well placed to ensure inclusive urban security policies that serve the needs of diverse communities and address inequalities across neighbourhoods. They can bring together expertise, resources and data, as well as the commitment of multiple actors in the interests of public safety, while simultaneously balancing these with wider social value judgements that inform the ethical principles, preferences, culture and aspirations of urban societies.

In delivering problem-based preventive strategies, political leadership, public trust and institutional commitment, appropriate levels of resources and buy-in from relevant stakeholders, are all vital to the success of sustainable interventions. Demonstration projects backed by rigorous research evaluations can provide valuable insights and learning but will result in modest enduring change if they are not embedded within infrastructures that align with cultural values, and if they are not underpinned by sustainable funding and supported by long-term organisational commitments. The shifting nature of crime and the interdependencies of diverse forms of vulnerability, harm and disadvantage will require city partnerships to explore new strategies to advance prevention alongside radically different models of governance and service delivery.

However, if the genuine co-production of security is to be more than a distant ideal or hollow refrain, this will require a reformed conception of what constitutes knowledge and how it is best mobilised and deployed. Research evidence can help reshape the social world it seeks to describe. To do so, it needs first to be appropriately translated, communicated and applied to inform action and change. As decades of criminological research testify, however, the effects of research on policy are not always benign. Knowledge does not simply solve governance problems but also creates new ones. Knowledge and governance are mutually interdependent. Knowledge is enacted in and through governance and the allied processes of implementation. Hence, knowledge needs to be coupled with practical action. Genuine co-production is “not about ideas alone” nor is it “only about how people organise and express themselves, but also about what they value and how they assume responsibility for their interventions” (Jasanoff, 2004, p. 6). This demands not merely a methodology or abstract evidence base but also a practice that combines problem-raising and problem-solving.

5 See <https://www.icarus-innovation.eu/>

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