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The roles of the public and the police in crime prevention

Abstract: The protection of a natural group territory by the inhabitants of a particular area has been replaced by separate aims linked to separate institutions, e.g. the maintenance of law and order, and ensuring children's safety, etc. Separate aims and institutions were required because people wanted guarantees of relative safety and peace, at home, at work and during recreation.

It seems to us that the public should make use of the possibilities available to strengthen or in some cases create networks for informal (and to some extent formal) social control. In the context of a decentralised welfare policy the public will have to try through participation or pressure groups to raise the question of public safety with the authorities concerned.

Key words: crime; public; police; prevention; social control; responsibility.

It has already been argued at length that the prevention of crime must involve informal social control. We will now consider the question of informal social control in detail and in particular the related issue of the roles of the public and the police. This leads us to pose the following questions.

Who are our fellow citizens? What do they expect from each other and what subcultural differences in attitude affect their judgement of each other's expectations? The feasibility and effective range of a strategy of prevention based on the three-factor model described above will to some extent be determined by differences in priorities as regards home, work and recreational needs, and differences in the perception of the social system and, not least, of the degree of individual freedom (anonymity).

To give an intuitive indication of subcultural differences in expectations we quote the following passage from "In the city park", a short story by Herman Pieter de Boer [2].

"The policeman on the beat had already walked past them three times. The leather of his new boots creaked and squeaked noticeably, but the ladies were not to be distracted. Their embrace continued, with sighs, kisses and whispers. The policeman made his decision, cleared his throat and took up a position in front of the couple with his hands behind his back. "What's all this, ladies?" They looked up. "Don't you recognise us?" asked the blonde in surprise. She had thrown her dotted veil back over her hat so that she could kiss unimpeded. "Not the faintest idea", said the policeman in his provincial accent. They looked at each other and burst into laughter.

"Where on earth are you from?" asked the other lady. "That's beside the point," he replied, rocking forward on his shoes the way policemen do, "but if you really want to know ..." The blonde said, "You're new to this city." "Quite correct," said the policeman, "but ..." "Well then, you couldn't know", she said. She treated him to a forgiving smile and added, while waving him on his way, "No hard feelings, officer!"

Sighing, the ladies sank back into their embrace, and were promptly lost to the outside world. The policeman furrowed his brow in an effort to gain more authority, opened his mouth and did not

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know what to say. He shifted his feet a few times and went on looking. But his ears were beginning to burn. He felt light-headed and was troubled by emotion.

Some distance away he so a naked man climb out of the pond holding a duck by the neck. The policeman stood motionless for a few seconds, his eyes screwed up tightly. He took a deep breath and then walked on at a steady regulation pace. He did his best to look like a real city policeman, with an expression on his face of “Yes, oh well, we know all about that.” Something on those lines, that kind of expression.”

This passage gives a striking illustration of the differences in attitude between the provinces and the city, as represented in the way the policeman changes. Why is he no longer a provincial? Perhaps because nothing surprises him anymore, and because this is his frame of reference when operating in the “big city”. The story also provides an implicit definition of a territory. The ladies wish to be left in peace as they kiss and cuddle in the city park. In the country there are no parks for recreation, and security and peace and quiet are experienced completely differently. In agrarian communities security or peace is dictated by all-or-nothing participation in the form of informal social control in operation there [4]. This forced participation in community life results in relatively strong social cohesion. On the other hand, it should be remembered that social roles, position, status and professional mobility are much less differentiated (less specialised) in the country than in the large cities. One might say that the rural population is more homogenous in composition. In particular, the low level of specialisation makes possible the operation of informal social control in the classic sense (small scale). This produces a defensible environment in which strangers, fellow inhabitants and children are kept an eye on quite regularly and constantly, and are exposed to criticism.

It is possible that the concept of a defensible environment, in which children could grow up in peace and quiet, would be valid for densely populated areas in large cities but it is highly unlikely, and would certainly not be valid for urban and suburban communities in general.

Urban and suburban societies generally involve strict segregation between the home and the place of work, the home and the shops, the home and the place of recreation, and between the place of work and the shops. In addition, there is a high degree of occupational specialisation. These factors make it difficult to define territories in terms of defensible environments. The level of general mobility is so high that it is a case of each individual heaving multiple varying territories.

It may even be questioned whether in this situation these terms have any meaning. Suttles calls urban., and suburban communities administratively pyramidal territories, which as a whole are designed to achieve security and peace. Other examples of such administratively organized pyramidal territories are city districts, municipalities, nations, and Western Europe, etc.

The achievement of aims such as security and peace in these administrative, bureaucratically organized contexts is a problem. In general this task is entrusted to professional specialists in organizational units such as the army and the police.

A similar form of professionalization is found in the way schoolchildren are cared for and looked after. At home the parents, guardians or others are responsible for the behaviour of the children. At school the teaching staff are responsible, while on the street school crossing patrols and the police watch over their safety. This example illustrates how informal social control has to a large extent had to give way to professional and formal networks of social control. The protection of a natural group territory by the inhabitants of a particular area has been replaced by separate aims linked to separate institutions, e.g. the maintenance of law and order, and ensuring children's safety,

etc. Separate aims and institutions were required because people wanted guarantees of relative safety and peace, at home, at work and during recreation.

What conclusions can we draw from this in relation to crime prevention and what is to be the role of the public in this? At the risk of repetition, let us state firstly that the present degree of informal social control is inadequate. The low level of control undertaken by the individual citizen is partly accounted for by the idea that crime control is the exclusive responsibility of government. There are two reasons why this is no longer a practical idea. In the first place, the results of victim surveys clearly show that the police force is not in a position to stem the tide of petty crime. In the second place, the idea is theoretically unsound: without a high degree of support from the population no police force can possibly control petty crime.

In the Netherlands the sixties saw the rise of the neighbourhood organization, the district committee, and other kinds of community bodies for democratisation and power sharing. Through participation or sharing responsibility these bodies try to influence decisions taken at the level of central government which affect local interests.

It seems to us that the public should make use of the possibilities available to strengthen or in some cases create networks for informal (and to some extent formal) social control. In the context of a decentralised welfare policy the public will have to try through participation or pressure groups to raise the question of public safety with the authorities concerned. In the view of Alderson [1] the police can play a leading role in supporting such public initiatives. If the police are to do this, they must be properly informed of crimes. This information can only be obtained if the public is ready and willing to report incidents. This again shows how the different tasks of the police should complement each other. The new task in the field of crime prevention does not make the traditional job of detection less important. The increase in the number of offences reported will mean that, unless the police have more success in solving crimes, an even greater number of people will be frustrated by the apparent inability or unwillingness of the police to take action. Apart from adopting a more effective approach (e.g. problem-oriented) to crime, the police could however probably avoid a good deal of frustration by giving people a realistic picture of the progress of their case and by honestly admitting where necessary that nothing can be done for the time being [3].

It is important to point out in this context (primary prevention) that preventing crime must be the concern of many different parties: the police, the office of the public prosecutor, the authorities (the mayor and eldermen), town planners and architects and, above all, the public at large.

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Роль общественности и полиции в предупреждении преступности

Аннотация: Защита территории естественной группы жителями определенной территории была заменена отдельными целями, связанными с отдельными институтами, например, поддержание правопорядка, обеспечение безопасности детей и т. д. Отдельные цели и институты были необходимы, потому что люди хотели гарантий. относительной безопасности и покоя дома, на работе и во время отдыха.

Нам кажется, что общественность должна использовать имеющиеся возможности для укрепления, а в некоторых случаях и создания сетей неформального (и в некоторой степени формального) социального контроля. В контексте децентрализованной политики социального обеспечения общественности придется попытаться через участие или группы давления поднять вопрос общественной безопасности перед заинтересованными властями.

Ключевые слова: преступность; общественность; полиция; предупреждение; социальный контроль; ответственность.

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