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Police and prevention: re-emergence of a strong idea?

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Between 1996 and 2001, the ICPC developed or conducted various projects on the preventive role of the police, including a series of three international seminars on police and prevention leading to the publication of a toolkit (“*The role of police in crime prevention*”) in 2002,^{1[1]} and the publication of reports on the role of the police in local crime prevention and on the police presence in schools.^{2[2]} The ICPC also conducted technical assistance missions in Mali, Chile, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The period 2002-2005 marked a pause in ICPC’s activities on preventive policing. While it was deemed important to draw the lessons emerging from this first phase of work, it is also true that the new focus on terrorism following the attacks of September 2001 considerably modified priorities in policing. While many experiments on different forms of policing, largely focussing on “community or neighbourhood policing” had taken place during the 1980’s and 1990’s, the terrorist attacks signified not only a halt but also in-depth reconsidering of these approaches to policing.

^{1[1]} A summary of the series of three seminars and the toolkit is available on ICPC’s web site at www.crime-prevention-intl.org under the part related to supporting action/ strategic seminars.

^{2[2]} Shaw, Mr., *Police force, Schools and Crime Prevention. With preliminary review of current practices.* Montreal: International Center for the Prevention of Crime, 2004.

Furthermore, few evaluation studies had been conducted to demonstrate the strengths or weaknesses of these diverse experiments and many police organizations were exhausted of being used, sometimes against their will, as a social “laboratory” of the changing relations between the State and the citizens, and of being subject to internal or external investigations, constant scrutiny and performance audits.

Thus, it is not surprising that preventive policing has lost some of its momentum during the last three years; yet, the importance of prevention and the demand for it has not diminished. This general overview of the problems is based on a first series of preliminary observations and will help identify some key issues.

I - Preliminary observations

During the last decade, a series of new laws on the police were adopted in several countries (England, South Africa, Belgium, Quebec and Ontario in Canada, etc.); however, the fundamental *missions* of police organizations have not changed significantly over the past fifty years. They still involve maintaining law, peace and public order, and include the role of the judicial police.

However, demands placed on police services have been subject to considerable modifications. Quantitatively, the demand has increased and the targets have become more diversified. City residents in many countries in the North as in the South have demanded increased control over “antisocial” behaviours such as begging, wandering, or other forms of occupation of public space considered to be “harmful” or nuisances, even though they do not belong per se to the realm of the criminal laws. Similarly, behaviours related directly or indirectly to the more widespread availability and use of alcohol or illicit drugs such as public use, micro trafficking or driving under the influence of substances, have led to increased demand for police intervention, either at the request of the state legislator, residents or both. The demand for police intervention in cases of family violence and sexual offences against children has also become more significant. Recently, terrorism has put more pressure on police organizations, and in many cases, this has led to reallocating resources, this affecting the capacity to maintain some of the “achievements” from the previous two decades with respect to community policing or problem-oriented policing.

This quantitative increase in demand for police intervention which predated the more recent pressures resulting from the fight against terrorism, may be attributed to three factors: 1) an increasing criminalization of individual behaviours and legalization of social relations in modern societies, 2) growing individualism and the subsequent decrease in informal social control and collective efficacy, and 3) the very success of police organizations themselves in becoming “indispensable” in responding to ever more diverse social and political expectations for the control of deviance and crime.

This quantitative change has also been accompanied by ***the growing complexity of crime problems, which often require new skills and approaches.*** The prevention of terrorism, the fight against money laundering, cyber crime and the trafficking of human

beings - to name a few - require the development of new investigation techniques, in addition to long and difficult procedures especially if these crimes are brought to justice. Although not as complex, minor everyday crimes and incivilities which are committed in communities have also added some degree of complexity if only because of their more subjective nature. Induced by phenomena such as globalization, free trade and new technologies, the complexity of police tasks also results from cross-cutting, whole-of-government approaches to governance, particularly evident in local crime prevention policies. More than working alongside other organizations or taking responsibility or participating in roundtables, integrated approaches involve working with others to create new tools and develop a shared vision in order to co-produce community safety. The diversification of coordination mechanisms and consultation forums requires maintaining open communication channels with community-based organizations and civil society, thereby contributing to complexity if not frustration as the comfort zone of autonomy appears to be constantly narrowing.

Police organizations have also undergone various changes. In some countries and regions such as France, United States and Quebec, community policing is losing ground: Moreover, police services are still preoccupied by the quality and strength of existing links with residents: measures of residents' satisfaction are an important performance indicator for many police forces. Various reasons may explain these changes.^{3[3]} Difficulties related to the implementation of neighbourhood policing have emerged, in particular, with respect to issues related to the participation and extent of "voice" of citizens. In various cases, local public safety forums have been created enabling elected officials and citizens to express their views on the organization's action plan and priorities. Often formal and sometimes unresponsive to the views expressed, these forums appear to have often failed to provide a real place for citizen input. In other cases, the consultative mechanisms are more flexible and accessible but limited citizen participation raises the fear that personal interests would prevail over the general interest.^{4[4]} A gap has also been observed between the official discourse on community-policing and its actual implementation within police organizations. For example, while community policing should lead to adopting new performance indicators such as knowledge of local actors and of the neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses, or the ability to mobilize partners, the more traditional quantitative indicators such as number of arrests or cases solved often continue to prevail. Furthermore, diverse accountability requirements imposed on police organizations may clash with the objectives of neighbourhood policing. Increasing the effectiveness of investigations is certainly justified since it may contribute to reducing the number of offences, but overemphasizing this aspect, and lack of clarity of the roles, community policing officers may become second-class officers both within the force, and for decision-makers and citizens alike. Finally, modifications in the organization and delivery of local and regional services have taken place for example in Belgium, Quebec, England and Australia. The redefinition of service areas,

^{3[3]} Reasons reported by Brodeur (2003) in his recent work on the police. See also Rock (2005) and Wilson (2005).

^{4[4]} Comparative work of Ocquetau (2003), and Donzelot, Mével and Wivekens (2003) has highlighted the various approaches and mechanisms related to the involvement of residents in American and French responses.

and which have affected staff in neighbourhoods has not always contributed to the effective implementation of community policing.

On a structural level, the police have been questioned or reorganized, in at least three respects.^{5[5]} The first one concerns the **links between the various levels of the police**. Whatever the administrative structure of the state, various reorganizations have been observed over the past few years: merging of police departments (in England and Quebec), creation of a municipal police (in France and Belgium), and decentralization of police management towards regions and departments or, in the case of cities, towards neighbourhoods. The second aspect concerns the **relations between the various public police institutions**. International, national, regional and local police had to create new co-operation mechanisms, due to the impact of unsuccessful and sometimes highly publicized investigations, as well as the emergence of complex issues such as terrorism and trans-national crime. Better sharing of information and more malleable management styles have ensued, resulting in more flexibility and decentralized decision-making processes gradually replacing the more traditional approaches of hierarchical and rigid management. Finally, the third aspect concerns the **development of new professions within or sometimes alongside the police**, such as “*community safety officers*”, etc.^{6[6]} While they are not police officers with full powers, these officers are part of the organization, which in turn raises issues related to their integration and the scope of their responsibilities.

The environment in which police operates has also changed. The **increasing importance of private security services**, which in many countries outnumber the public police forces (in the United States, Canada, England, South Africa, etc), has created a new dynamic for the security offer.^{7[7]} Competition between these different policing organizations is but a minor issue. More important are issues of their respective domains of competence, rapidity and flexibility of the response, as well as clarity of the identity of the various police institutions and issues of ethics and deontology. In addition, social diversity and migration movements, legal or illegal immigration, and the integration of immigrants, present increasing challenges for the police, as was revealed in enquiries on police “racism” carried out in England, Australia, or Montreal.^{8[8]} This raises two sets of issues. Some relate to the external environment: how to maintain an effective response, capable of being sensitive to cultural differences while keeping a universal dimension and equal treatment for all. Others concern the internal environment: how to integrate ethnic minorities within police organizations, and ensure a better representation of society without falling into communitarianism.

^{5[5]} The work of Bayley and Shearing (2001) should be consulted on all these issues; see also Scott and Goldstein (2005).

^{6[6]} We could also add field officers in cities operating in the area of prevention and security, such as France and Belgium. For examples, see also Bailleau and Pattegay (2005) Faget and of Maillard (2005) on community safety and prevention officers in France.

^{7[7]} Ocqueteau, 2005, also read ICPC’s interview with Clifford Shearing in the International Observer of June 2005: <http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org/io>

^{8[8]} We can also mention the use of force. Also see Kleiman, 2005.

Finally, **police studies have undergone a major fragmentation**, with a notable shift towards private security and the new safety professions. More researchers, especially young researchers, are interested in the police, and several topics are being examined. Yet, it can be said that few are interested today in the issues related to community-based or preventive policing.

II - Some key issues

Three key issues emerge from these observations: accountability and transparency, methods and tools, and responses to specific phenomena.

The issue of ***accountability and professional responsibility*** is related to internal administrative aspects such as the evaluation of the organization's overall performance and of each police officer individually, and to external administrative aspects such as relations with the public and with government funding institutions. Elaborating indicators, setting performance criteria and benchmarking have become central issues in the past few years, in particular in the United Kingdom but also in Canada, Australia and Belgium.^{9[9]} Among the main questions are the following: how and on what basis is the effective distribution of the resources being determined? How can the performance of organizations be evaluated? How can the economic performance of police interventions be measured?

Corruption is an important issue in various countries of Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. It is less structural and yet present within various police forces in Northern countries. Also, respect of fundamental human rights in relation to the use of force for example, remains an important issue. How are abuses identified? What responses should be provided? And given the importance of confidence in the capacity to maintain the rule of law, promote respect for the law, and responsibly participate in the production of collective safety, how can trust be established between citizens and the public police when it has been hindered?

More specifically, developing good relations with the public raises particular issues in relation to specific segments of the public such as ethno-cultural minorities and youth. This is especially true when one considers issues of "racial profiling" or imposing curfews for youth.

The second set of issues concerns the ***methods*** which have been developed in the past few years, including tools such as **crime mapping and analysis**, and more generally **problem solving** as well as more sophisticated use of information technologies. However, their use remains scattered and evidence suggests that problem solving approaches tend to focus on short-term solutions, rather than those long-term approaches addressing the root causes problems. How can the use of problem solving techniques be

^{9[9]} England was amongst the first countries to elaborate indicators and systematic measure systems for police performance (also see the sites of the Audit Commission and the HM Inspectorate of the Constabulary).

improved? What type of training will be useful in order to make their use more systematic? Police training continues to raise questions, especially in areas such as preventive, community or problem-solving policing which are taught in training schools but tend to not survive easily concrete policing experience in the field. Conversely, traditional approaches to police management and crime control policies are rather incompatible with modern police training^{10[10]}. Beyond the academic training of police officers, what other tools for vocational training might help bridge the gap between theory and practice?

One of the key methods which have been used is **partnership**, or the capacity **to work in co-operation** with other organizations to produce public security. This applies to public administrations (justice, schools, social and health services), civil society and private security actors which play an increasingly important role. Many countries such as France, Belgium, Canada, England, or Australia, have a rather long experience related to the practice of partnership, where police participate in prevention councils, “*crime reduction partnerships*”, or local public security forums, as well as numerous roundtables on specific issues. However, partnership continues to raise various challenges for police organizations, given the time it requires, and the possibility – or in some cases willingness - to share information. There is also the issue of knowing to what extent the police is ready to modify its action plans in order to adapt them to common directions through these various partnerships. More specifically, one of the most important partnerships which have been established in the past few years is related to schools. There has been a considerable increase in police in schools and a rising demand in this regard. Yet, many questions remain open in terms of its impacts on reducing crime or increasing safety, its economic and social costs, and proper methods of effective implementation. What are the objectives of police presence in schools? How can this presence complement the educational role of teachers? How do we maintain education to citizenship and respect for norms and the rule distinct from police intervention?

Thirdly, the **fight against terrorism and organized crime** cannot be downplayed. They are priorities for all police institutions which require approaches and methods beyond prevention. But there is not doubt that the **preventive component in this domain deserves to be better understood and further developed**, given the links – albeit more often hypothesized than demonstrated – between local crime and organized trans-national crimes, and between the social and economic exclusion of some groups of youths and networks of terrorist groups. Finally, in addition to the **more recent issues related to new technologies such as cyber crime, the use of the Internet to elicit violence, and identity theft**, public police forces continue to face more traditional offences, often more visible in the public space and more publicized or more politicized, such as violence related to alcohol and firearms, street gangs, or the control of illicit drugs. Disquieting examples were recently observed in France, Australia and Canada. The response to traditional offences and “incivilities” which are the everyday reality in cities surely does not have the same strategic importance as the prevention of terrorist acts for police organizations; yet, it exerts important pressures on them. In addition, disregarding these crimes may well widen the gap between already cynical citizens and public action, and

^{10[10]} For example there above, the study in the course of Alain and Barrel (2005).

even generate additional problems insofar as the “broken windows” theory goes. How and on what basis should police organizations establish intervention priorities? How can the links between local and trans-national organized crime be better assessed without merging both concepts or using them to achieve corporate objectives? How can effective interventions be implemented so as to reduce pressures on police staff while also responding to the legitimate requests of the citizens?

Conclusion

Community and preventive policing approaches have lost ground in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, though the process had begun even before in some countries. But the need for preventive police action has never fully disappeared and is re-emerging. Similar to any type of prevention, there is no single definition, and it is sometimes difficult to make prevention operational. Yet, because of its privileged position closest to experiences on the ground, and the citizens it directs its service to, the police is more capable than many to understand the need for preventive action. The ICPC will support further initiatives in this area by contributing knowledge and expertise, and fostering international co-operation and technical assistance.

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Some Internet sites which provide research reports, methodological guides or good practices

Australian Institute of Criminology

<http://www.aic.gov.au/policing>

The Internet site of the AIC provides a list of reports and useful links to police issues, such as community policing and the optimum use of resources.

Audit Commission (UK)

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk>

The Audit Commission is responsible for the financial audit of police authorities and auditing best value performance plans. Its national studies support service improvement.

Centre for Problem-Oriented Policing (US)

<http://www.popcenter.org>

The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing is a non-profit organization funded by the COPS Office to advance problem-oriented policing. It does this by offering information about ways in which police can more effectively address specific crime and disorder problems. The Center is comprised of affiliated police practitioners, researchers, and universities dedicated to the advancement of problem-oriented policing.

Inspectorate of the Constabulary (UK)

<http://inspectors.homeoffice.gov.uk>

For almost a century and a half Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (HMIs) have been charged with examining and improving the efficiency of the Police Service in England and Wales. By virtue of Section 1(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 1999, all police authorities in England and Wales are required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which the function of policing is exercised within their force area, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Security 21

<http://www.security21.org>

Security 21™ initiates programs designed to create and express new global and local strategies required to respond to the challenges of the 21st Century. Its focus includes not only the major institutions of criminal justice, but also the interrelationship of public institutions with those of civil society. In particular, it explores options in the harnessing of private and non-profit institutions which have the potential to further public safety, human rights, and conflict resolution. Another aspect of Security 21™'s work is the assistance it provides to police agencies at the strategic planning level. It helps them develop new community policing models, face the threats posed by transnational crime and offers knowledge management solutions that respond to their needs.

The Police Foundation (UK)

<http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/>

The Police Foundation aims to maximise the benefits of policing for all citizens living in the UK using research and strong networks in government, academia and the corporate and voluntary sectors to improve policy and practice on policing, community safety and criminal justice. It emphasizes use of high quality evidence in providing a strictly impartial voice on issues related to contemporary policing and, in time, it aims to become the country's knowledge hub on policing and public safety.

The Police Foundation (USA)

<http://www.policefoundation.org/>

The purpose of the Police Foundation is to help the police be more effective in doing their job, whether it be deterring robberies, intervening in potentially injurious family disputes, or working to improve relationships between the police and the communities they serve. To accomplish our mission, we work closely with police officers and police agencies across the country, and it is in their hard work and contributions that our accomplishments are rooted.

Vera Institute of Justice (US)

<http://www.vera.org>

Policing in the United States and in democracies around the world is in the midst of a dramatic transformation. Police departments are becoming modern service organizations. In addition to their accountability to elected mayors, governors, or presidents, police departments are answering to the individual citizens they serve, and to legislative oversight committees, inspectors general, and increasingly rigorous professional standards. In the process, the best police departments are proving that respectful treatment of all citizens can be consistent with the most effective police tactics against crime. Vera is working with police officials and community organizations in several cities and countries to help this transformation succeed.