Public Space and the Situational Conditions of Crime and Fear

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Abstract
This special issue explores the situational conditions of crime and perceived safety in public spaces. In this foreword, we first examine the concept of public space and then discuss how public spaces relate to crime and fear of crime. In the final session we introduce the different articles that compose the Special Issue, with contributions from Australia, Colombia, India, Sweden and the United States.

Introduction

No environment reflects the meaning of urban life better than a public space does. Public space, whatever its definition or shape, is a place where one interacts, socializes, passes by, and some-times—only sometimes—may become a victim of crime. As such, public space is inherently a criminogenic environment because it provides crime opportunities, some obvious to an offender only at certain places and at certain times. The literature on environmental criminology and place-based crime prevention has long demonstrated how important the particular situational conditions of public spaces are to crime and perceived safety.

This special issue contributes to this topic by exploring the situational conditions of crime and perceived safety in public spaces in articles from the United States, Sweden, Australia, India, and Colombia. One of the novelties of this issue is that some articles deal with users, the people who "consume" public spaces and may sometimes become a victim of crime or, just by their presence, may prevent crime from happening. Thus, the issue of intersectionality of safety in public spaces, particularly in terms of gender and age, is relevant. This perspective on safety is important because gender and age influence the risk of being victimized by a crime, the "reading" of potential risks in one's activities in these settings, and how places are actually used by the individual.

As illustrated in this special issue, crime and safety in public spaces are not issues that can be easily dealt with within the boundaries of a single discipline such as criminology. Rather, they require

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knowledge and contributions from other disciplines. This issue therefore assembles a unique set of articles that deal with public space and the situational conditions of crime and fear, from the perspective of sociology, criminology, geography, architecture, and urban planning. The articles represent a collection of high-quality studies, which cross traditional boundaries between disciplines yet share a number of important commonalities. Some are theoretical, others of a more empirical nature.

The articles in this issue show examples of interventions to deal with crime and safety problems in public spaces that rely on the situational nature of crime and are devoted to a set of opportunity-reducing techniques under the umbrella "situational crime prevention" (Clarke, 1997). These techniques include, among other things, improving surveillance of areas that might attract crime, making it difficult for crime to happen, and deflecting potential offenders from settings in which crimes might occur. The articles make reference to related theories, such as routine activity, crime pattern theory, general principles in environmental criminology, and to the current literature on fear of crime. These articles also provide examples of different approaches and methods applied to the theme, ranging from secondary data (official statistics, surveys of different types) to information collected through observations, photographs, and inspections of public spaces as well as interviews with users and relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, the featured contributions were intentionally selected from different country contexts and to cover issues of crime in parks, streets, public transportation, inner-city areas and entertainment zones. The needs of different user groups, such as women and the elderly, are taken into account, especially through attempts to understand gendered violence in public spaces, its dynamics, and prevention. A discussion of implications of the results in these articles offers a wide range of suggestions, all aiming to provide support for actions and interventions that can promote safety in public spaces. This final section of the articles attempts to demonstrate the relevance and importance of this topic to academics and practitioners alike.

This introduction is divided into four parts. The next section examines the concept of public space, followed by a discussion of how public spaces relate to crime and fear of crime. The last section is devoted to a presentation of the different articles that compose the "public space and the situational conditions of crime and fear" issue.

The Concept of Public Space

If you google a definition of "public space," you will get millions of hits. This is no surprise because, as acknowledged by De Backer (2016), if you were to ask 10 people what public space means to them, chances are you would end up with at least 10 different concepts. This is not a problem per se. What is worrying is perhaps how people use the term public space as if its definition were self-evident. What we mean by public space bears a morality, which we argue, should better be spelled out, because whatever definition we assume has implications for how we, as researchers, approach and study public spaces. Moreover, the meaning associated with public spaces has practical implications for which behaviors are welcome, allowed, wanted, and forced in these open arenas. What is a public space? The first entry in Wikipedia reads:

> A public space is a social space that is generally open and accessible to people. Roads (including the pavement), public squares, parks and beaches are typically considered public space. (Wikipedia, 2016)

This definition merely tells us about accessibility and exemplifies what in real life is commonly conceived as a public space. Yet, it does a poor job in specifying who accesses such spaces, what is done, and what can legally be done in these spaces. Németh (2012) suggests that ideally public space may mean space legally open and accessible to all without permission of anyone else, like a common. In reality, most public spaces are conditionally free because action allowed in these spaces falls within the law of the locality in which the space is located. This definition provides little

information about less tangible meanings associated with a public space; it lacks the symbolic significance associated with public spaces as peaceful arenas of self-expression and enjoyment (fairs, sports) as well as spaces of contestation (quarrels, fights, riots, demonstrations) and appropriation by ''illegitimate'' users (homeless, illegal hawkers, criminals).

Moreover, this definition of public space also misses the geographical bearing that ''space'' has, which is bound to go beyond its location. At a macro-level, far from being an isolated unity, a public space interacts to varying degrees with other parts of the urban fabric by facilitating access and/or escape. At a microlevel, its spatial dimension links to the ideas of access and whether it is indoors or outdoors (or both), which gets us closer to the concept of ''public place.'' A public place can be a hermetic shopping mall (under a roof), for example, and need not be publicly owned, which implies such a place might not be accessible to all and therefore may not be a public space in the strict sense of the word.

Finally, this Wikipedia definition misses the temporal dynamic of public spaces. What is ''publicness'' today is definitely not the same as publicness in the past. Truly, public space and its meaning have long mirrored and been an indication of equality and democracy of societies, from medieval ''commons,'' to Roman ''forum'' and Greek ''agora'' (see a review in De Backer, 2016). More recently, some of these reshapes of public space have to do with the ways cities have been idealized, planned, built, and further regenerated. We can identify extremes of the spectrum by looking at public spaces in the 19th century's run-down industrial cities compared to the European garden cities idealized by Ebenezer Howard, to the socialist utopias of the modernistic project with Le Corbusier and to its critics, such as Jane Jacobs in the mid-20th century United States, and later to the new urbanism. The digital society has added a virtual dimension to public spaces, allowing crime and crime risk to be redefined in terms of cybercrimes, with new modi operandi, often linking off-line criminogenic conditions with ''honey-pots'' and ''step-stones,'' traps typical of the virtual world. Similarly, the commodification of security has undeniably put pressure on the existence and meaning of public spaces, even when it fails as a commodity (Goold, Loader, & Thumala, 2010), with the emergence of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, surveillance and control by citizens, gated communities and military urbanism (Németh & Hollander, 2010), and semiprivatization in nonplaces (Augé, 1995) with highways, airports, and malls as other hermetic places (Jewell, 2015).

Why is it so important to think about the concept of public space? First, because our focus in this special issue is on the circumstances of crimes in public spaces, namely, common, shared environments that can be accessed by individuals often at all times, such as parks, pedestrian paths, tunnels, streets, interstitial spaces between buildings, transport nodes such as bus stops, and surrounding areas.

Second, crime—and the nature of each crime—depends on where the offense takes place. We have long accepted that for a crime to happen, certain elements—such as a target, a motivated offender, a capable guardian—must converge in place and time (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In reality, though, crime will only take place if those elements are in the ''right'' place for a particular type of crime. Public spaces by their nature are perfect for pickpocketing but not for robbery; the former demands a crowd, such as those found in public spaces; the latter requires anonymity, seclusion, and poor guardianship, typical characteristics of places with restricted access.

Third, it is important to think about the concept of public space because offense definitions (and offense seriousness) are determined by the situational conditions of crime. Whether a crime happens in a domestic, private environment or in the public realm is information that serves to support the work of the police. In Sweden, for instance, the penal code makes a distinction between crimes that happen in public and private. The difference in crime definitions of ''outdoor/indoor places'' is based on the role of the police. For instance, ''indoor'' are considered ''places where order and crime cannot be affected by police surveillance or where any other type of intervention of the police is limited, for example, in premises of various kinds, dwellings, workplaces, shops, restaurants, entertainment and

sport facilities'' (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2016, p. 20). On the other hand, ''outdoor'' places are considered places where order and crime can be influenced by police surveillance or patrol, such as ''streets, market squares, parks, green spaces and the like, means of transport (car, bus, train, tram, subway) and premises adjacent to transport nodes (railway, subway, and traffic terminals to which the public has access), business and service centres under a roof (market square), subways and passages, pavement cafes, sports facility or other facility for public events, the character of outdoor installation, for example open stadium without a roof'' (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2016). Linked to the definition of place, the Swedish penal code also splits offenses by gender, age (minors in a separate category), and type of suspect, either known to the victim (close relationship) or unknown (more than name and appearance). Thus, if a woman is beaten by a neighbor in the laundry room that they are both entitled to use, the crime is classified as ''assault indoors against adult woman, suspect familiar with the victim,'' while two boys seriously kicked in the body and head by unknown boys on the plat form of a commuter train station is classified as ''assault against male minors outdoors with unknown suspects.''

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Public Order Act of 1986 states that offenses in a public place include ''a highway and any other premise or place to which at the material time the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission''; similar definition is found in 2009's Policing and Crime Act. If the offense takes place in a ''private setting,'' the common association is with the concept of ''dwellings,'' which is defined as ''any structure or part of a structure occupied as a person's home or as other living accommodation ... includes a tent, caravan, vehicle, vessel, or other temporary or movable structure.'' Yet, crime in a dwelling does not necessarily mean a domestic setting; it may mean indoors and not public. For example, if an offense occurs at a time when a public place is not open to the public (e.g., a hospital clinic's waiting area outside of the clinic's business hours), then it is likely to be considered an offense that occurred in a private place. Conversely, shouting racist abuse from a dwelling at a person in the street could be considered a public order offense in a public place (National Health Service, 2015).

In the United States, the legal definition may change from state to state. For example, Texas state law defines a public place as ''any place to which the public or a substantial group of the public has access and includes, but is not limited to, streets, highways, and the common areas of schools, hospitals, apartment houses, office buildings, transport facilities, and shops.'' A more general definition states that public place is ''generally an indoor or outdoor area, whether privately or publicly owned, to which the public have access by right or by invitation, expressed or implied, whether by payment of money or not, but not a place when used exclusively by one or more individuals for a private gathering or other personal purpose'' (U.S. Legal, 2016). In summary, regardless differences in legal definition of what a public space is in different countries (or within a country), if a crime happens in a public space, its seriousness is determined by the rules of publicness of that setting but also the extent these rules are put in practice by those who manage and consume this particular public space. We discuss this issue in more detail in the next section.

Public Space as a Criminogenic Place

Most public spaces are environments capable of concentrating people and therefore offer crime opportunities. Transportation nodes, parks, sports arenas, and university campuses illustrate the types of criminogenic conditions that might be at play in these environments. The environments where crime concentrates are different from other places in the city (Sherman, Gartin, & Buerger, 1989) because they are crime hot spots, that is, they have the capacity to attract and/or generate crime (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995). Crime generators pull ''masses of people who without any predetermined criminal motivation stumble upon an opportunity too good to pass up. Crime attractors lure motivated offenders because of known criminal opportunities'' (Frank et al., 2011, p. 1).

Public spaces may interact with surrounding areas and generate crime. For instance, Bowers proposes the idea of "crime radiators" and "crime absorbers" (Bowers, 2014), the former composed of risky facilities that act as "radiators" by causing crime in the immediate environment as well as internally, while an "absorber" would be a place that has the opposite effect. Crime concentrations have long been a subject of interest in criminology (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995; Sherman et al., 1989; Weisburd & Amram, 2014), and their stability over time has given support to the idea that there is indeed a "law of crime concentration at places" (e.g., Andresen & Malleson, 2011; Curman, Andresen, & Brantingham, 2014; Weisburd & Amram, 2014).

Public spaces that have been classified as crime hot spots are areas of convergence. They are often at or around transportation nodes, bus stops, subway or train stations (Ceccato, 2013; Ceccato & Newton, 2015; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2012), schools (Willits, Broidy, & Denman, 2015), commercial properties or shopping malls (Clarke, 1997; Schneider & Kitchen, 2002), sport arenas/games (Kalist & Lee, 2014) or belong to inner-city areas, outdoor environments close to bars (Pridemore & Grubesic, 2012; Ratcliffe, 2012; Roncek & Maier, 1991), entertainment areas, or urban parks (McCormick & Holland, 2013). On the other hand, some public spaces allow anonymity and therefore other types of crime. Robbery, rape, and the dumping of garbage and chemicals, for instance, demand poor surveillance and reduced opportunities for intervention (e.g., Ceccato, 2014; Ceccato & Uittenbogaard, 2013; Pettiway, 1982). These are characteristic of forests, desolated places, and roadsides, for example, as well as interstitial areas between buildings, from residential areas to transport nodes. Perhaps place spaces are what have been called "nonplaces" (Augé, 1995, pp. 77–78), often peripherally located, irregular sections of the urban area that are part of the urban fabric, yet lack identity and an apparent function in the city structure. Milgran (1974, p. 46) indicates that anonymity can vary, from total anonymity, in a nonplace, for instance, to full acquaintance, where a person lives. In full acquaintance situations, they "offer familiarity but they may be stifling because an individual may be caught in a web of established relationships and expected behaviors." In particular, that type of social control drives an offender to seek other areas where anonymity can be ensured.

Public Space as a Place of Fear

Although public spaces are thought to be accessible to all, why is it that safety in these places may not be attainable by all? Safety is a function of the way a person perceives it. Previous research has shown that an individual's fears depend on his or her individual characteristics such as physical abilities, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background (Box, Hale, & Andrews, 1988; Garofalo & Laub, 1979; Pain & Smith, 2008). Moreover, safety (security) possesses a "reflexivity dimension" (Loader & Neil, 2007, p. 166), meaning that its nature depends on those who produce it and share it. For instance, certain transit users may avoid certain empty bus stops or routes late in the evening because they do not feel safe, or a neighborhood park may be avoided by the elderly after school hours because of the simple presence of rowdy youngsters. Forests, parking lots, and service stations along roads and other desolated areas may generate fear among some people but may be just "the place" that young people treasure the most, as they can gather and spend time free from adult supervision (Ceccato, 2016). These public places would certainly not be among the "fearful places" if youngsters themselves were asked to indicate the places they feel fear.

Safety also depends on what happens in these places, and in turn what happens in them depends on how safe these places are perceived to be. Loukaitou-Sideris and Eck (2007) indicate that walking and cycling are greatly influenced by what happens in streets and other public spaces. Safe neighborhoods invite outdoor activities, including daily walks. However, if the public spaces are perceived as dangerous (e.g., the elderly might be frighted by bicycles), those who have the chance to choose an alternative walking path will certainly avoid them. These dependence issues of safety and

users' needs are discussed in this issue by focusing on the inherent physical and social characteristics of public spaces.

The mechanisms linking poorly maintained environments to fear can be originally associated with the so-called ''broken windows syndrome.'' Signs of physical deterioration of a place are thought to be more important determinants of fear of crime than the actual crime (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Applying this to public spaces, acts of vandalism and disorder function as symbols of the extent to which an area is in decline or that nobody is in control (Lewis & Maxfield, 1980), visible at the microlevel. Yet, public perceptions of disorder have also been linked to serious crimes and implicit stereotypes about race and deprivation at neighborhood and city levels (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). These stereotypes are easily incorporated by different segments of the housing market (Gibbons, 2004; Wilhelmsson & Ceccato, 2015), also thought to be responsible for perpetuating geographical segregation patterns. In sum, there is controversy over to what scale fear of crime is actually triggered by clues present in public spaces (Ceccato, 2012; Ferraro, 1995, 1996; Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2008, 2011; Jackson & Gray, 2010; Lagrange & Ferraro, 1989; LaGrange, Ferraro, & Supancic, 1992; Nasar & Fisher, 1993). Nasar and Fisher (1993) suggest that hot spots of fear seem to converge at the microlevel but increase in areas characterized by low prospects, high concealment, and high boundedness. Measures of macro-level fears lack site-specific effects. The discrepancy between macro- and microlevel metrics calls for considering both macro- and microlevel factors triggering fear of crime, particularly the role of bystanders that might, just by their presence, prevent a crime from happening and thus making the place feel safer. This also calls for a systematic assessment of other types of surveillance, such as CCTVs, and their effects on crime and perceived safety, as it has been illustrated in this special issue.

Research has long claimed that a lack of clearly defined boundaries between private and public spaces decreases crime opportunities and improves the perceived safety of insiders (Cozens, 2002; Cozens, Saville, & Hillier, 2005; Glasson & Cozens, 2011; Jeffery, 1977; Newman, 1972). Yet, physical barriers, such as those found around some privately owned parks (Németh, 2012) and gated communities (Landman, 2012), may exacerbate differences, generating more fear. One may wonder whether there is a right balance between safety and the levels of physical barriers in public environments and what significance these boundaries may impose on places meant to be open to all. Some of these topics related to the perception of boundaries and barriers in urban public spaces are further discussed by the articles presented in this special issue.

Framing the Articles

The special issue starts with an article that examines the nature and incidence of female sexual victimization in public spaces (*Article 1*), by Manish Madan and Mahesh Nalla. They explore gender differences in perceptions of the occurrence and location of sexual harassment in public spaces as well as the extent to which such behaviors are regarded as serious using sample survey data in Delhi, India. One of their key findings is that there is a match between indicators of perceived likelihood of female sexual harassment and actual self-reported victimization in most public transportation modes but a particular mismatch between perceived safety and actual risk of victimization in taxis and autorickshaws. They indicate interesting place and time patterns of victimization. One of the suggestions put forward by the authors is campaigns warning perpetrators of punishment and urging bystanders' intervention.

The role of bystanders as potential guardians in cases of sexual crimes is assessed in the article by Alana Cook and Danielle Reynald (*Article 2*). They review the relevant literature shedding light on what is currently known about the presence of potential guardians at the scene of sexual offenses against women. The authors find that there is very little in the current literature about the specific characteristics of bystanders in public settings in the context of sexual offenses against women.

Based on evidence from private settings, Cook and Reynald find that individual characteristics such as age, and most significantly gender, will affect bystander willingness to intervene in various situational contexts. They also find that the likelihood and the extent of intervention by a guardian are not constant across situational contexts and that they vary by the characteristics of the crime event.

The availability of potential guardians is also key to explaining elderly people's perceived safety in the immediate environment of senior housing in Stockholm, Sweden (*Article 3*). In this article, Ceccato and Bamzar find that elderly perceived safety follows a "distance decay" from the building in which they reside, the safest place being the areas immediately outside the entrance of the senior housing. The authors also investigate the potential relationship between types of public spaces, frequency of use, victimization, and declared perceived safety. Findings also show that those who are fairly mobile avoid some places anyway, so fear does not restrict their mobility as previously expected but does make them walk farther and stay mobile. This study focuses attention on micro-features of the urban environment, such as types of buildings, facades, alleys, streets, and bus stops, and the types of human activities that they generate, as they may become criminogenically relevant and/or trigger feelings of unsafety among the elderly.

This topic is further analyzed using two urban parks based on two different city and country contexts. These articles are more methodological in nature and tell the experience of using as indicators of safety, features of the public space, and park use. In the first article, Payne and Reinhard use an urban park in the municipality of Anchorage, Alaska (*Article 4*). The authors assess the built environment and how people use the space within a dozen distinct zones of the park. Consistent with prior research, they find that increasing park usage decreases crime and disorder and that disorder is associated with a lack of natural surveillance. The second piece of research that focuses on urban parks is by Iqbal and Ceccato (*Article 5*) and evaluates the adequacy of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in guiding the inventory of safety conditions for an urban park. Although CPTED has been widely used in several types of public spaces—in housing developments and neighborhoods, commercial properties and shopping malls and transportation systems—little evidence has been found in public spaces such as parks. Findings show that the design (including territoriality), management, and context of the park affect the park's crime and safety conditions. The article highlights the advantages and challenges of using CPTED principles to inventory public space units such as parks. The study is based on a park with a relatively high level of crime located in the inner-city areas of Stockholm, Sweden.

The last two articles are also devoted to inner-city dynamics, crime, and situational crime prevention. In *Article 6*, Gerell assesses whether implementation of CCTV to assist police patrols in the prevention of crime at a violent crime hot spot led to fewer assaults. Previous studies showed inconsistent results about the impact of hot spot policing and/or the use of CCTV as a tool for crime prevention in inner-city areas, so the author decided to test the theory in a relatively small city in Sweden. His findings show that actively monitored CCTV cameras with directed patrols at hot spots of violent crime may be less effective in a Swedish context (medium-size town) than they appear to be in North America (often tested for larger cities). Gerell calls for further research, a study that can test where and under what circumstances actively monitored CCTV with hot spot policing can be effective at reducing crime.

Also devoted to inner-city areas, the study by Trujillo and colleagues (*Article 7*) explores opportunities for violence in public places with high alcohol outlet densities in a South American case, namely, in Bogotá, Colombia. After characterizing each setting, they find a number of important differences in place-based dynamics that increase opportunities for violence and crime. Findings suggest that understanding people's behavior and interactions in the streets, where alcohol outlets cluster in space, can help explain differences in violence between contiguous places, even when these are similar in terms of alcohol availability and physical environmental characteristics. The

authors suggest that intervention measures should therefore consider the local dynamics of micro-environments before implementation (even the most popular hot spot policing interventions may not be effective in all areas) and foresee some challenges imposed by the types of environment found in many cities in Central and South America.

The special issue illustrates innovative methods linking crime and perceived safety to features of public spaces as well as the activities they may attract. Studies by Madan and Nalla in India using a sample of survey data and Gerell in Sweden with police-recorded statistics illustrate a more quantitative approach in distinct but complementary issues in environmental criminology. Gerell makes use of geographical information systems (GIS) to identify night club density while Ceccato and Bamzar to map areas perceived as safe and unsafe by the elderly. Observations and field inspections are common to nearly all studies with the use of checklists, templates, maps, and photographs. In summary, this special issue exemplifies the successful use of mixed method approaches to the analysis of public space and the situational conditions of crime and fear. I am proud to share with *International Criminal Justice Review* readers the knowledge gathered in these seven articles.

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