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What is This?

Crime prevention in rural Sweden

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Abstract

In this article we report examples of crime prevention (CP) experiences using case studies in rural municipalities in Sweden. Data from three different sources were analysed: semi-structured interviews with representatives of CP groups in eight rural municipalities, responses from an email survey, and a database of CP projects receiving funding from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Findings show that youth-related problems are the major CP concern, which are translated into projects against violence and alcohol and drug addiction. National CP guidelines overlook the nature of rural crime, its seasonality and what happens outside the urban core. Although CP groups in rural Sweden face a number of challenges, they show indications of being well prepared to address youth-related problems. The article concludes with a summary of results and flags the need to extend the international evidence on crime prevention to include experiences that go beyond large city problems.

Keywords

Crime prevention, offences, countryside, remoteness, Sweden

Introduction

Studies reporting experiences with crime prevention (CP) in rural areas are relatively few in the international literature in comparison with those in urban areas (Jones, 2010; Payne et al., 2008; Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). In this article we suggest that there is a need to extend the international evidence of CP to include experiences and challenges from rural areas. We report examples beyond the US and UK contexts using case studies of rural areas in Sweden. In 2010 there were 300 CP groups across the country.¹ We

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assess the nature of CP practices in rural areas by looking at CP groups' actions, organization, cooperation, projects, evaluations and challenges. We look more closely at experiences with youth-related problems because, historically, youth crime constitutes the most common issue targeted by CP groups (BRÅ,² 2005) and risk factors for youth crime have a different impact in rural than in urban areas (Barclay et al., 2007).

Far from being a homogeneous entity, *rural* is considered here as a diverse set of communities with different characteristics and needs but that share a number of qualities and challenges. In Sweden, rural municipalities can be of two types: 'remote rural' areas are more than 45 minutes by car from the nearest urban neighbourhood with more than 3000 inhabitants, whereas 'accessible rural' areas are 5–45 minutes by car from urban locations with more than 3000 inhabitants. Municipalities with more than 3000 inhabitants and reachable in 5 minutes by car are regarded as 'urban' areas (Swedish National Rural Development Agency, 2005). Although problematic because it does not incorporate other dimensions of rurality, this definition reflects the municipalities' population size and accessibility, which are important criminogenic factors.

For this study, we selected eight municipalities (in northern, middle and southern parts of Sweden) to capture a variety of types of rural areas according to the municipalities' geographical location, type of economy and crime levels. Figure 1 indicates the municipalities classified according to these criteria. There are 290 municipalities in Sweden, with an average population size of 31,000 inhabitants. There is a clear north–south divide in the population distribution: most remote rural municipalities are located in the mid-northwest of the country (22), whereas accessible rural (156) and urban (112) areas are found in the mid-south. The study areas representing the new and the old economy are chosen based on the percentage of the active population employed in service sectors (Åre, Gotland, Storuman and Söderköping) and in traditional sectors of the economy (Arvika, Markaryd, Dorotea and Gnosjö), respectively. Selecting municipalities using crime rates was a challenge in rural areas since their rates do not differ much from each other. High and low crime levels are defined based on the relative rural regional average rate: high-crime municipalities are those with crime rates above the average and low-crime municipalities show a rate below the rural average (Åre and Gotland from the new economy and Arvika and Markaryd from the traditional economy are high-crime municipalities; low-crime municipalities are Storuman and Söderköping from the modern economy and Dorotea and Gnosjö from the old economy).

The next section reviews the international research literature and puts forward a number of reasons why CP should accommodate the diversity of rural conditions, as well as presenting hypotheses tested in the study. Then the methodology and the Swedish case study are presented. The final sections examine the characteristics of CP work in rural areas and review current challenges for CP in rural areas.

Theoretical background

Why is a rural perspective necessary in crime prevention?

Far too often low crime rates in rural areas are taken as a sign of there being 'no problem'. This can lead to the wrong assumption that, 'because there is less crime in the countryside,

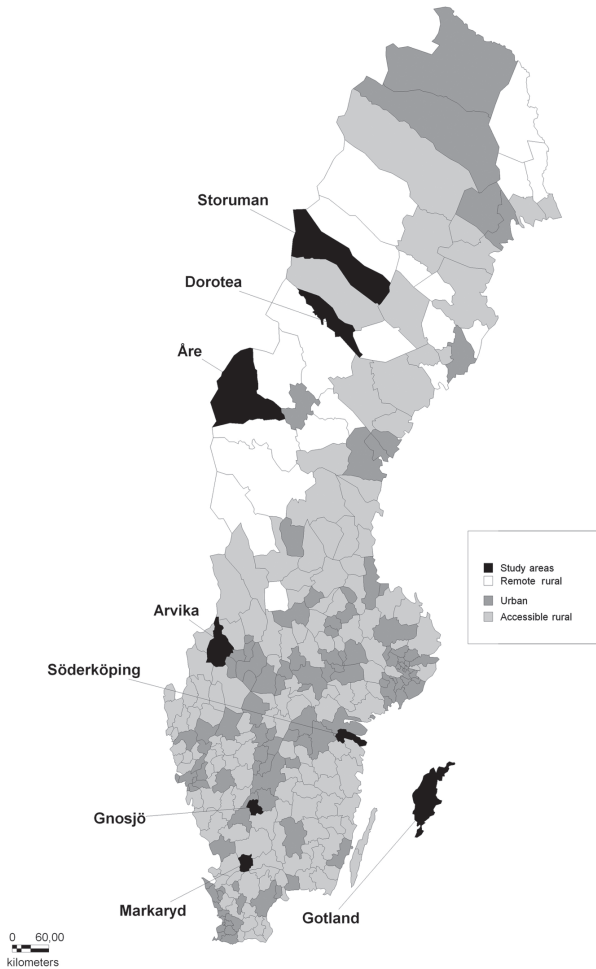


Figure 1. Characteristics of the study areas

crime is not a problem for people living there' (Yarwood, 2001: 206). Wells and Weisheit (2004) suggest that, although rural crime rates are often lower than the rates for large cities, it is a mistake to assume that patterns of crime are homogeneous across rural areas. In the UK, for instance, although the risk of some crimes appears to be much greater in urban areas, other crimes, such as theft from motor vehicles, appear to be a problem for rural residents (Marshall and Johnson, 2005). New evidence from Sweden (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011) also shows a differentiated pattern of violent and property crime between urban and rural areas but also within rural areas.

CP initiatives must adapt to the nature and mechanisms behind crime in rural areas. Osgood and Chambers (2000) show, for instance, that, although rates of poverty were not

related to juvenile violence, unlike in urban settings, poverty was negatively related to residential instability. In rural areas, rates of juvenile violence varied markedly with population size: counties with the smallest juvenile populations showed exceptionally low arrest rates. Social factors (such as family structure) as predictors of crime are more important than economic ones in non-urban areas (for a review, see Wells and Weisheit, 2004). In Sweden, the variables predicting rural crime are not the same. The proportion of foreign population and population increase tend to explain theft rates in urban areas but not in rural areas (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011), providing evidence that researchers may be dealing with a different context for crime.

CP models often focus on problems that are more relevant for large cities than for rural areas. Youth rioting, such as in Stockholm and Malmö, although it constitutes youth violence, is never witnessed in rural municipalities. Ceccato and Dolmen (2011) suggest that in Sweden, although violence (assaults by a stranger outdoors and assaults against women indoors) was increasing in urban areas (58 percent), the highest percentage increase was found in remote rural (119 percent) and accessible rural areas (85 percent) between 1996 and 2007. There are differences within rural areas. Accessible rural areas showed relatively high rates of drug-related crimes, burglary and robbery compared with remote and urban areas.

The lack of attention at national level to crimes in rural areas is not unique. At European level, the rural dimension is omitted in the evaluation of safety and CP policies in Europe by Robert (2010). In the Swedish context, national CP programmes also tend to focus on urban areas. They provide guidelines for work done by local CP councils without taking potential urban–rural or regional differences into account. For instance, in the Swedish *Allas vårt ansvar* ('Everyone's responsibility') guidelines for local CP, the words '*landsbygd*' and '*glesbygd*' (two words for *rural* in Swedish) are not mentioned once (Ministry of Justice, 1996). In the *Samverkan* ('Cooperation'), local CP partnership experiences in four municipalities are discussed with little focus on how they differ from each other and/or from large urban areas (BRÅ, 2010).

Overall anxieties and fear of crime may be more of a problem in rural areas than actual crime. This means that the role of CP must be considered in rural areas beyond the traditional frames of crime control. Fear is a multidimensional phenomenon, triggered by local and global factors (Gerber et al., 2010); it may reflect unbalanced levels of victimization (Tilley, 2011) but it is also affected by levels of trust, for instance between the community and local police (Mullen and Donnermeyer, 1985; Nofziger and Williams, 2005: 248).

Neighbourhood watch schemes and safety audits have been important examples of community safety practices. According to Yarwood and Edwards (1995), the voluntary involvement of communities in such schemes may raise important questions about the nature of decision-making and who actually influences and controls the rural police. In the Swedish context, the implementation of community safety schemes based on local partnerships (composed of police representatives, the municipality, local business, local associations, individual members of the community) went hand in hand with overall decentralization of the police in the mid-1990s. Local policies were created to be close to the community (*närpolis*, or local police) under each police district,³ supported by local CP councils. This partnership model is now being reformulated (BRÅ, 2010),

balancing between a local anchored model and the inevitable police reorganization that goes towards a centralized model.

There is a need to know more about CP in rural areas because the urban–rural relationship is changing. The redistribution of the population from small villages to larger cities that has been taking place in the last three decades in Sweden affects people's routine activity and their chances of becoming a target for crime. Moreover, urban–rural relationships are currently redefined by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and cell phones, making crime less dependent on physical space. In 2010, as much as 91 percent of Swedes had access to the Internet at home, compared with 79 percent in 2004. Most young people carry a mobile phone – 95 percent of girls and 92 percent of boys. The difference between large cities and rural areas is not significant for young people (Statistics Sweden, 2011), which means that they are equally exposed to certain types of crime wherever they live. This development imposes new challenges for CP since law enforcement authorities have to deal with offenders and victims who may reside far from their territorial jurisdiction. At the same time, social media (Twitter, Facebook) have become a tool for community policing, allowing residents themselves to engage in daily police work. In Sweden, the use of this technology has spread from large cities to police forces in rural areas,⁴ and has been used by citizens as a way to share local information about safety (Ljunggren, 2012).

Crime prevention in rural areas: Theory and hypotheses of study

In Sweden, the most comprehensive evaluation of CP work at municipal level was undertaken by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ). The study investigated how CP groups developed after the implementation of a national CP programme in 1996 (*Allas vårt ansvar*), which aimed to create CP groups over the whole country and support the activities of those that already existed (BRÅ, 2005). Sweden does not have an official community policing policy, although this document served to guide the work of police and other local actors in local CP. BRÅ found that leaders of CP groups devoted, on average, less than one day a week to CP activities, such as participating in the council's meetings or organizing activities and courses. A later analysis of CP councils in Sweden showed that the more experienced CP councils actively sought and used knowledge (crime reduction models, courses in addiction problems, gendered violence) and evidence (best practices, project evaluation) more often than the least experienced CPs. Lack of resources, poor engagement of certain members of CPs and limited knowledge were highlighted as barriers for CP work. The largest majority of CP councils focused on alcohol and drug addiction preventive measures among the youth in their areas. In 2008, a series of agreements between CP groups and regional and national levels consolidated a local-based CP model in Sweden (BRÅ, 2006a).

Youth-related problems have been the focus of CP in rural areas worldwide. For the USA, Payne et al. (2008) discuss the results of a youth violence prevention plan using a rural community. In the UK, youth crime and anti-social behaviour are commonly problems associated with CP in rural areas, normally linked to alcohol and drug addiction (see Forsyth and Barnard, 1999).

H1: Most CP projects in Sweden are still devoted to youth-related problems.

The lack of data on rural crimes may give the impression that they do not exist. One example is farm crime. These crimes are under-detected simply because of the difficulty in reporting them but also because, when registered by the police, they cannot easily be identified as farm crimes. This may explain why the observed rates of burglary and vehicle thefts were found to be higher than expected between 1996 and 2007 for both remote rural areas and accessible rural areas in Sweden (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). In the UK, Jones (2010) argues that, even though farm crime has been identified as a problem for policing in isolated areas, it remains a neglected area of research by criminologists. The same is true of the problem of environmental crime⁵ in rural areas, especially because statistics are limited, of poor quality or both (BRÅ, 2006b).

H2: In the Swedish case, we would expect to find little CP knowledge and interventions on problems outside the main urban core of these rural municipalities, those being farm and environmental crimes.

CP in rural areas has been characterized by voluntary policing and local partnerships (neighbourhood watch schemes, farm or horse watch, safety audits, community patrols, for example). In relation to the UK, Yarwood (2001) suggests that these schemes normally rely on existing voluntary networks of people who already live in these communities. This might also apply to the Swedish case. The stereotypical image of retired citizens, church priests and parents working together as volunteers in CP councils in rural areas is often in the news.

H3: Rural CP councils are based on existing voluntary networks of people living in the community with strong voluntary participation, the *eldsjälar*, or local enthusiasts, working fully or partially as volunteers.

Assessment of CP actions in rural areas follows the overall trend in CP: knowledge remains fragmentary and patchy (Wikström, 2007). Read and Tilley (2000) suggest that adopting a systematic problem-solving approach improved the prospects of success in reducing crime and disorder in community policing. In Finland, Savolainen (2005) shows that active participation of local CPs in the national CP programme has not resulted in reduced levels of crime and violence. In the UK, Berry et al. (2011) suggest that successful partnerships are often characterized by strong leadership and strategic direction and by regular exchange of relevant information among members, including with researchers within the partnership. Bullock and Ekblom (2010: 29) are more careful with their conclusions. They pointed out that 'evaluation often remains weak and descriptions of successful projects do not always contain the right information to help practitioners select and replicate projects suitable for transfer to their own contexts'. In Sweden, BRÅ (2006a) indicates that about half of the CP groups had some type of evaluation of their activities and one-third had an action plan.

H4: Poor assessment routines and few contacts with external actors are expected to characterize CP work in rural municipalities in Sweden.

Methods

To obtain a comprehensive picture of CP experiences in rural areas in Sweden, we combined data from three different sources: (1) a database of CP projects receiving funding from BRÅ; (2) an email survey of representatives of CP groups in rural Sweden; and (3) semi-structured interviews with members of CP groups in eight rural municipalities in Sweden. To choose the study areas, we examined police statistics (1996–2010) and three victimization surveys (2006, 2007, 2008) carried out by BRÅ.

Projects database. Before beginning fieldwork, we examined those CP projects funded by BRÅ between 2004 and 2010.⁶ We evaluated the types of municipalities that receive funding, the types of projects, activities and organization and whether these projects included any assessment of their own activities.

Email survey. Because the database covered only those municipalities that received funding, a short email survey based on five hypothetical scenarios was sent to all municipalities with a CP group in rural Sweden. The first scenario described a youth-related problem in the community, the second was related to crime against nature, the third was about violence against women, the fourth was a typical farm crime and the last one concerned seasonal crimes. CP members were invited to describe the most important short- and long-term actions they would take as a group to tackle the described problem scenarios. The response rate was 62 percent. The analysis presented here draws on the response to the first scenario.

Interviews. The main data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview, conducted face-to-face (in Swedish) with members of local CP councils in eight selected municipalities. The interview template covered 40 subjects with open-ended questions, divided into five sections (background information, organization, activities, examples of good practice, and current and future challenges in CP). The template with open questions was adapted to accommodate the difference in expertise of each CP member. A minimum of five and a maximum of seven people were interviewed in each municipality (49 interviews in total; about 6 individuals per study area). We interviewed a *core group* involved in CP work through *snowball sampling* (Babbie, 2010). We talked to policy officers, school representatives, social services, NGO representatives and citizens. These conversations provided access to written material, slide presentations, reports, photographs and maps of CP projects.

We selected four pairs of rural municipalities for our study population (Figures 1 and 2) using five criteria: classification as a rural area (accessible or remote rural), geographical location (north–south), levels of crime (relatively high crime rates over time), type of economy (old or new economy) and that they were not neighbours to each other. Variations in crime rates, although not very large, tend to reflect the size and dynamism of the local economy. We chose municipalities that were traditionally rural (with forestry or farming as the main economic basis) as well as those with a strong service sector (with hotels and tourist activities). Long distances would characterize the everyday life of those from north Sweden compared with intense daily commuting among those in the south because of the short distances between them.

Framing Swedish rural areas as a case study

Of Sweden's 9 million residents, about 2 million live in rural areas. Most people are concentrated in the south, where the most accessible rural areas are located. Rural areas are more criminogenic now than they were a decade ago, but urban areas still have higher crime rates for all types of crime (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). Police records over 15 years show that urban and accessible rural areas are at higher risk of crime than the most remote areas, although the increases in urban and rural areas were converging to the same level in 2010. The short-term directions of change seem to follow one another quite closely, but in 2010 the increase for all areas dropped to levels similar to those found in 2004 (Figure 3). An explanation for these trends is difficult to ascertain; when aggregated at this level the pattern follows a north–south divide.

There are also differences by crime type. Between 1996 and 2007, burglary increased in both accessible and remote rural areas whilst car-related thefts increased relatively more in remote rural areas. The greatest increases were in violence (larger in rural than in urban areas) in the same period, both attacks by an unknown offender outdoors and assaults against women indoors. Although there is evidence that this rise reflects an increase in people's propensity to report violence, the view is that such an increase also reflects a genuine rise in levels of violence, related to growing socioeconomic polarization and alcohol consumption (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011).

Some of the differences in crime rates are related to the economic structure of the municipality. For instance, rural touristic municipalities tend to experience seasonal variations in crime rates, often dependent on visitor inflows. They also tend to have a number of service sectors (restaurants, hotels) that are not found in municipalities with a more

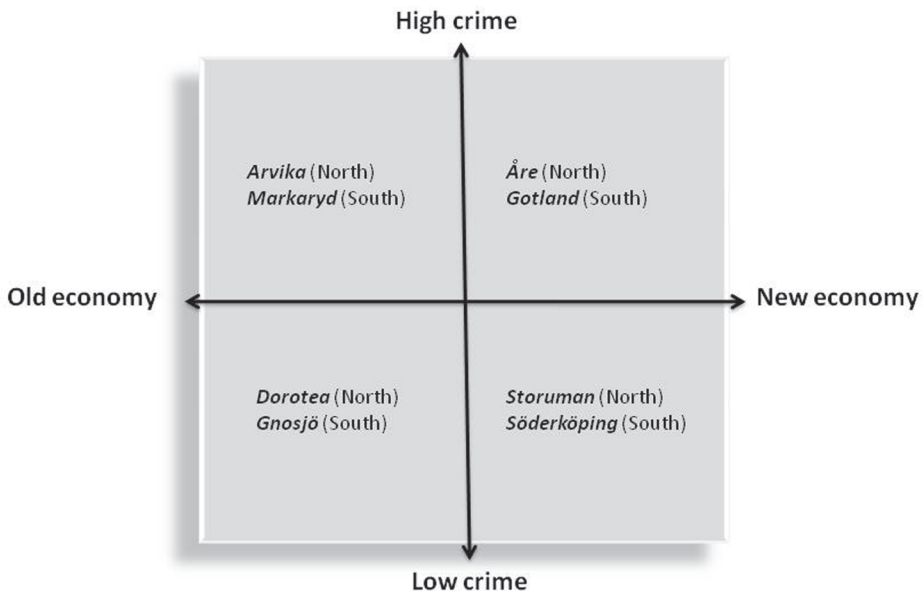


Figure 2. The selection of the study areas

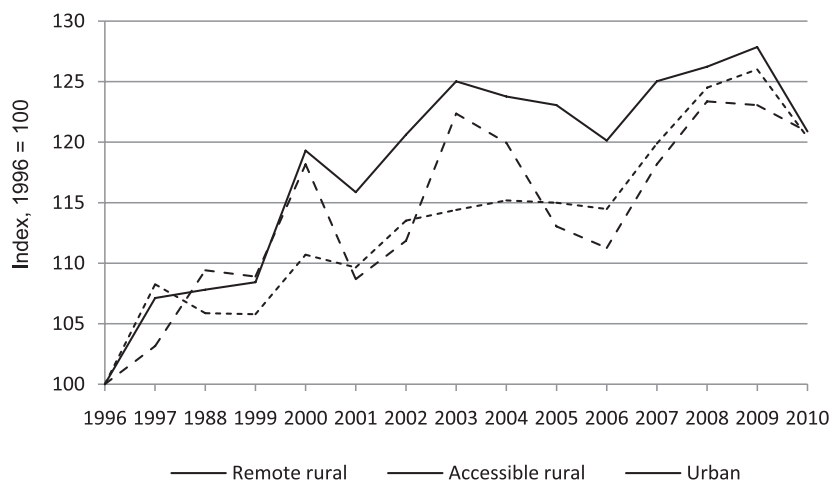


Figure 3. Total number of offences, by area type, 1996–2010

traditional ‘old’ economic structure (mining, forestry). Ski resorts in the winter and summer destinations and municipalities in the ‘cottage belt’ around Stockholm are examples of this dynamic (Figure 4).

Crime rate differences within rural municipalities may also reflect how resources are distributed among individuals. Nilsson (2004: 26) shows that in Sweden ‘a one-percentage point increase in the proportion of the population with an income below 10 percent of the median income would increase the overall crime rate with 2.9 percent, everything else held constant’.

How does police reported crime relate to declared victimization and perceived safety in rural areas? In Sweden, annual victimization surveys have been conducted since 2006. These have shown a stable victimization structure, despite an overall increase in cases of violent crime reported to the police. According to the 2008 National Victimization Surveys, fear of crime tends to be higher in urban areas ($\chi^2 = 57.1$, $df = 4$, $p < .00$), where most people feel victimized ($\chi^2 = 40.9$, $df = 2$, $p < .00$), often the young age group (16–24 years of age) (Figure 5). There are indications that municipalities that have experienced the largest increases in population express higher levels of fear ($\chi^2 = 71.9$, $df = 4$, $p < .00$). Females tend to be more fearful than men regardless of where they live, but those living in urban areas in the south declare themselves to be most fearful. Similar patterns in perceived safety have been reported elsewhere in Aust and Simmons (2002) and Higgins et al. (2010).

Results

Overall picture of CP in rural areas

The meaning of the words ‘crime prevention’ seems to be straightforward. However, if one asks a police officer, a social worker or a community representative what it means,

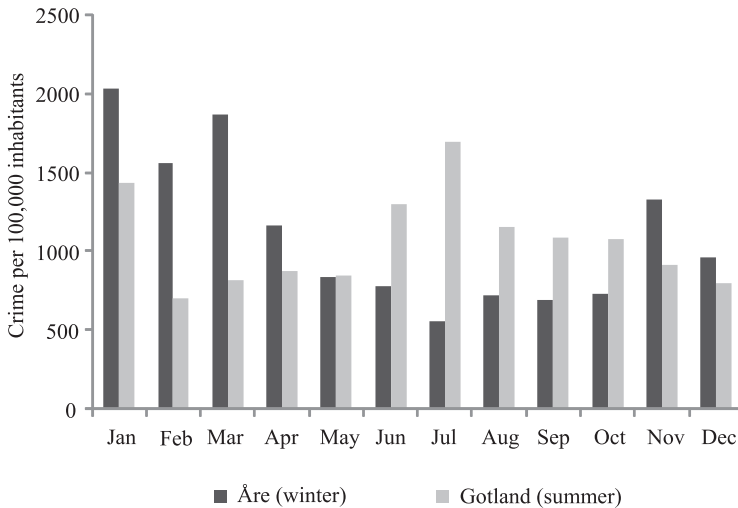


Figure 4. Seasonal crime problems in Gotland and Åre, 2010

there are likely to be as many definitions as the number of people asked (Pelser, 2002). This was also the case in our study areas. Some of the definitions from participants in the study who were interviewed demonstrate that CP is a ‘multidimensional construct’ built up from their particular experience working in the area:

Effective CP in rural areas is largely dependent on social control. It is by far the best crime prevention effect that we have in the small community; everybody knows everybody. (Police inspector, low crime, old economy)

CP is lot of things, it’s about integration of foreigners and I feel very much of it is also a work of prevention against honour violence and the like. (Save the Children representative, high crime, new economy)

Successful crime prevention is about limiting young people’s access to alcohol, finding alternatives, getting parents more involved. It’s a little different culture up here in the north. (Health care adviser, low crime, new economy)

Things happen even in small municipalities (domestic violence). They have to be discussed. When necessary, we must act! (Crime victims association, low crime, old economy)

Although differences in definition are more often found between old and new economies (perhaps because of seasonal crime problems), there are no major differences in the way representatives define CP between high and low levels of crime. Overall, CP representatives tend to spell out what they do and their role in CP. For instance, police define CP based on the role of formal social control, trust and social networks in tackling criminal events that take place in public places. Those working with domestic violence tend to

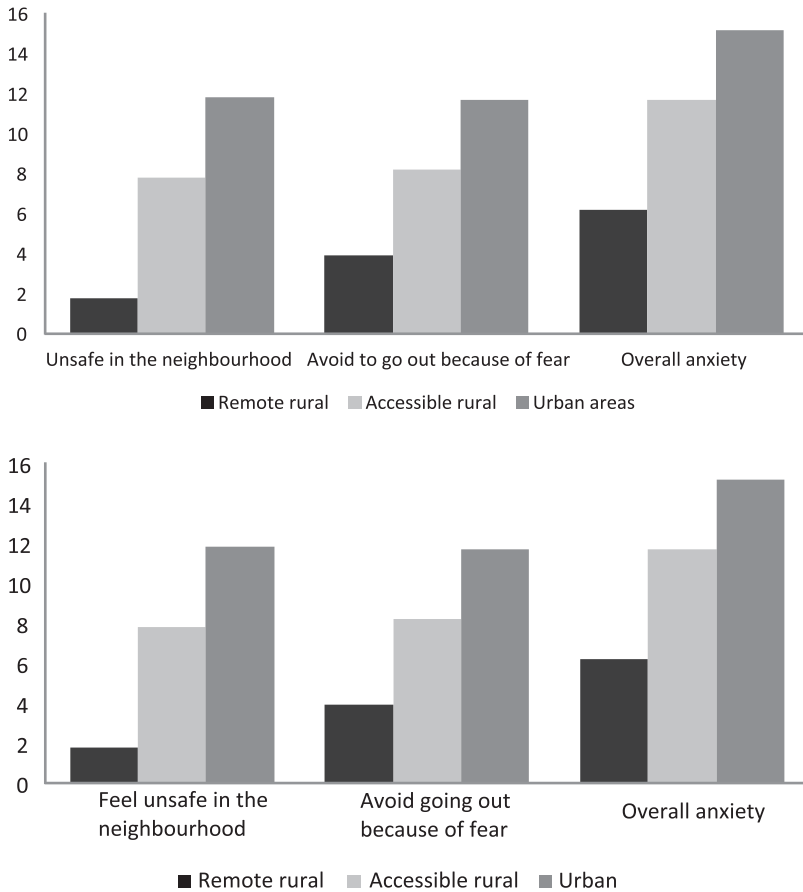


Figure 5. Individuals’ perceived safety (percentage of respondents), by municipality type
 Data source: BRÅ victimization surveys, 2006, 2007, 2008.

see CP’s ‘therapeutic’ function for the community in places where violence in the private sphere is a problem.

It would seem that CP groups in rural municipalities are different from those in big cities not only because they deal with lower levels of crime but also because they can afford to tackle issues for which people in urban areas do not have the time or the resources. Many would also argue that being small is an advantage with the type of the work done in CP with youngsters. They mean that ‘naming and shaming’ as a CP strategy, for instance, works better in a smaller community because ‘everybody knows everybody’. Some suggest that the fact of being small is an advantage since a ‘problem’ is solved quickly – ‘unofficial talks’ may become ‘official’ just because ‘one happens to run into someone else’. However, what is perceived to be an advantage by some may be an indication of unbalanced power relations that, in a small community, may lead to social exclusion (Yarwood, 2002) or help consolidate other interests than CP itself. Conflicts between safety and economic goals are exemplified by the concerns expressed by these CP members:

Cooperation in the CP works fine ... but there are some things I am against. ... I think it is a disadvantage at times that those who have control over the money also 'sit on' the CP council. If you take the economic point of view instead of the CP one, you may 'sit on two chairs'. I think in CP terms all the time, that's my job and I want to put this message across. (Police inspector, low crime, old economy)

There are always those who criticize what you do. ... There was someone who thought this programme would encourage people to drink more. ... There were complaints that it would kill the tourism industry. Of course there were some restaurants that felt it in their pockets when they could not serve an unlimited amount of alcohol. (Safety coordinator, high crime, new economy)

Only 2 projects out of a total of 37 funded by BRÅ during 2004–10 had some rural focus because of their location (the 16 grants to small towns do not differ in nature from those in urban areas). Figure 6(a) shows the most important areas dealt with by these CP projects. A popular goal is the improvement of expertise of those involved in CP, usually training and seminars for and by the practitioners themselves. There are also projects dealing with offending and drug and alcohol abuse, actions aimed at improving collaboration within partnerships and, surprisingly, a quarter of the projects aimed at increasing residents' perceived safety. One-third of the projects receiving grants are located in the three metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Most projects are characterized by partnerships headed either by local or regional police forces or by members of the municipalities themselves. Most of these projects do not include any formal follow-up. When they do, the evaluation is characterized by simple assessment procedures (Figure (6b)).

Most CP representatives stated there was good internal collaborative work, but not all did so. Some groups show signs of a sectoral split between those who work with social CP, often with more long-term strategies, and those who work with situational crime initiatives, with more site- or event-related initiatives. Figure 6(a) shows, for instance, that improving collaboration between partners is often a reason for requesting external funding. Interviewees suggested that the Swedish legislation on data secrecy and handling, although necessary, is a major hindrance to CP work (the confidentiality regulations are thought to be misunderstood or misused). In some municipalities, the social services have asked for permission to share information between authorities in order to establish actions to help youngsters at risk. The information-sharing in some cases supports the family and the school so they can prevent children from embarking on a possible criminal career. Many CP members cooperate between neighbouring municipalities (often within their own field), and also with the police authority at the regional level, but only a few have direct contact with BRÅ, universities or other external organizations. If such cooperation happens, it is project based.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, CP representatives (core members) are often employed part time, are rarely volunteers and may not always come from existing local social networks. A typical example is that meetings may take place during the day time and part of the representative's salary is earmarked for CP work. They may receive funding for their CP activities from the municipality or by applying for external funding from regional or national sources or from the European Union. There are those who work

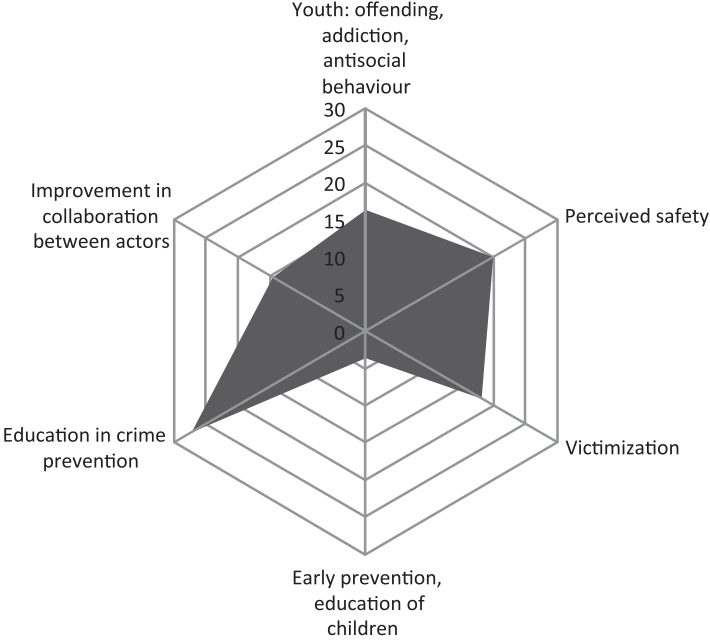


Figure 6(a). Issues addressed by the CP projects financed by BRÅ (percent)

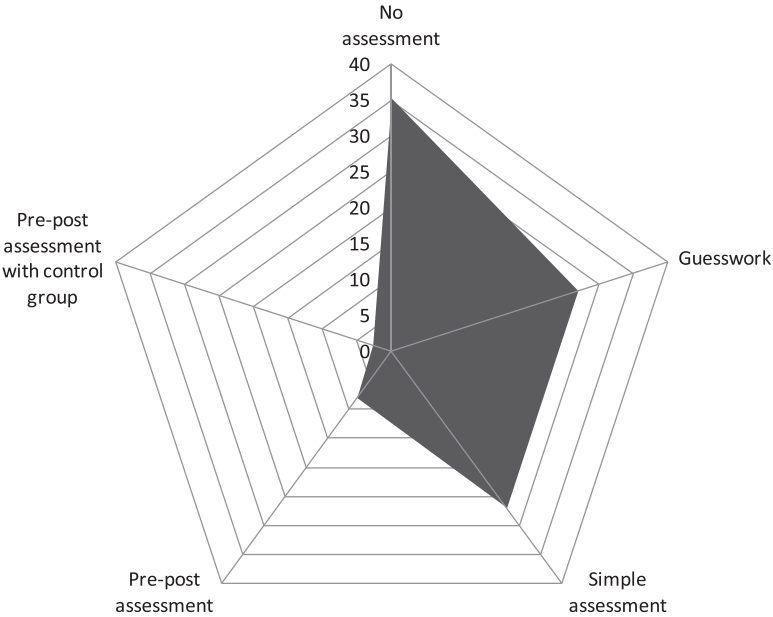


Figure 6(b). Type of evaluation in CP projects financed by BRÅ (percent)
Data source: Projects granted funding by BRÅ, 2004–10.

actively as volunteers in neighbourhood watch groups, safety audits or other schemes, but they are rarely core CP members.

The actions of CP representatives are much more institutionalized than was previously thought. This means that CP councils work pretty much from similar guidelines, and since, for most, CP is part of their daily work, they tend to follow their regular job practices in the police, in school or in the social services in the municipality. The institutional model of CP is certainly a result of a long tradition in local planning in Sweden, with strong participation by community representatives in local affairs (although this model relies much more on rational planning principles than public participation initiatives). This institutionalized model has been influenced by the way in which *Allas vårt ansvar* guidelines have affected CP organizations and priorities since the mid-1990s and by local agreements in 2008.

CP representatives do not necessarily live in the municipality in which they work; some commute on a weekly or daily basis. This is more common in northern municipalities than in the southern areas because of the long distances between villages. This also explains why CP representatives highlight that, although their group is operational, it may be inactive for some time. Not surprisingly, police officers tend to be more 'on call' than other members for urgent CP matters because CP is part of their community policing duties:

I live 120 kilometres from here. So I stay with my father and at the station in the week. This has become like my second family so we have a very open atmosphere here at the station. ... There is a small community but a bit special because we have two local police districts. ... I think we are a bit unique in that case. But it's many kilometres in between, so it's a natural part of it up here. (Police officer, low crime, new economy)

CP groups in northern Sweden differ in terms of organization from those in southern municipalities. First, whereas all the selected southern municipalities have a formal CP group, none in the north have a group working under the name 'crime prevention council'. It would be unreasonable to say that they do not have similar goals, but northern municipalities clearly have a looser organization. Secondly, CP groups in the north describe lower levels of cooperation within and outside the group. Different actors might be actively engaged in their own network but more rarely with other groups outside the CP core. Finally, activities in CP groups in the northern municipalities tend to be driven more by general health and social work issues and less by crime preventive interventions than CP groups in the southern municipalities.

As expected, we found that young people were the most important issue for CP councils in rural areas. All eight municipalities highlighted the problems of alcohol and drug addiction and their related problems, some being seasonal and associated with violence in both the public and private spheres, vandalism and, to lesser extent, property crimes. On a daily basis, CP tackles problems of perceived safety, often relying on safety walks, involving the local community in general. Through partnerships with schools, CP members may be involved in programmes aimed at integrating refugee children arriving in these municipalities. Farm crimes (theft of trucks, fertilizers, cattle) do not appear on the main agenda. As initially hypothesized, CP work more often deals with the problems of

the 'urban core' of the rural municipality and therefore rarely focuses on environmental crimes, which may go under-detected as a criminal offence. Examples from local news are the dumping of oil or other chemicals on the land or in water bodies, illegal hunting and fishing, air pollution, deforestation and some petty crimes, such as the burning of furniture, noise from sawmills and littering. There are a few exceptions from our study cases that are recognized as criminal offences:

What exist here are the 'old sins'. We are fighting with an old paper mill (here) but also with 'old sins' at the harbour that we are trying to solve. Here we had a huge flood almost 10 years ago. (Politician, high crime, old economy)

This 'lack of interest' in both farm crime and environmental problems as criminal offences in rural areas is partially related to the lack of systematic data and knowledge available on these offences from official police statistics. Police records on thefts cannot be broken down by location or type (vehicle theft on a farm might be a family car or a truck). For environmental crime the situation is even more complicated. According to BRÅ (2006), there are major difficulties in detecting and prosecuting these offences. Even when they are detected, those responsible are rarely prosecuted.

Although local CP councils demonstrate good practice in a number of CP areas, there is an overall lack knowledge about what works and what does not. As hypothesized, few activities within a CP framework are assessed. A lack of skills (lack of knowledge about crime causation combined with myths about the efficiency of certain CP practices, lack of cooperation within and outside the group, failing to make use of existing data sources and information for CP work) among those involved in CP work seems to be at the root of the problem – from the conception stage through to actions and assessment (note that a significant proportion of CP activity relates to individuals' own training; Figure 6(a)). Although most CP groups state that they make use of crime statistics or other equivalent relevant information, little of their work seems to be evidence based. When they are innovative, they tend to invest in projects that have been tested elsewhere (safety walks, drinking restrictions) by importing models and taking them for granted as examples of 'good practice'.

We have something called the W-model as well. Actually, it is nationally called the Y-model, but we reformulated it so it suits us. There is a guy in our CP who works with a 12-step programme of the X-model. He is also involved in this group because of the link between alcohol and violence against women. (Safety coordinator, low crime, new economy)

Safety surveys have become popular but it is unclear whether these inform CP work. This fact has serious implications because it limits the work of CP groups: they tend to stick to initiatives that are already in place and are well accepted by the community (such as youth recreation centres).

Addressing young people in rural areas

CP groups in rural areas appear to be well prepared to deal with daily problems among young people, or they at least have the organization to deal with individuals who are at

higher risk of offending or to prevent children and teenagers engaging in risky behaviour.⁷ Keeping youngsters 'busy' is a common stated long-term strategy to prevent youth problems. Youth problems comprise a variety of issues, from truancy and acts of public disorder to alcohol and drug addiction. What is most striking, however, is the similarity of statements from CP members about how they would respond to a hypothetical youth problem scenario in their community. A large majority of CP councils mentioned that they would rely on 'social' CP actions involving cooperation between the police, schools, the social services and youth leisure centres. The homogeneity of these answers is certainly explained by the infrastructure in place, the service routines that are strongly embedded in the Swedish welfare system and the groups' attempts to follow BRÅ's guidelines. However, some of these CP groups would rely on the involvement of young people themselves and their families to address problems – this more personal approach cannot be expected from CP groups dealing with the same problems in large urban centres.

In practice, CP groups approach youth problems in rural areas in two ways. The first relates to youngsters who are already causing concern (because of truancy and fighting) and may be labelled locally as 'troublemakers'. Targeted actions are therefore directed only to this group, often involving the school, the parents and, in more serious cases, the police and social services. For those with confirmed problems of addiction, in at least two municipalities there is a specific programme involving frequent checks for drug abuse. For this group, collaborative work and information-sharing between the police, schools, families and the social services are crucial for their success.

The second way is to focus on all youngsters in the municipality. The aim of these initiatives is to keep youngsters entertained, away from the 'boredom of the countryside', engaged in structured or semi-structured activities, often after school hours, under the supervision of adults. Activities in these centres may not be directly linked to CP but 'keeping youth busy' is often regarded by CP groups as a crime preventive measure *per se*. This may be a festival in the summer and, on a daily basis, youth leisure centres (*Fritidsgård* or *Ungdomsgård*). These centres play an important social role because they may constitute the only 'parents-free' zone devoted to leisure in the community. With a limited supply of cultural and social activities for the young, leisure centres and festivals indisputably play an important role in the social life of the community. It is entirely another story, however, to expect that, just by having youngsters in one place, these activities are crime preventive. This blind confidence in the crime preventive effects of youth leisure centres has been contested by scholars. For instance, Wikström and Torstensson (1997) indicated that, if one takes a municipality, any municipality, and asks someone to make a list of CP projects undertaken by that municipality and later asks him or her to choose a project from this random list, there is a high chance that the selected project involves youth recreation activities.

Youth recreation activities are still, 15 years on, the most common type of measure used to prevent crime. Mahoney and Stattin (2000) showed in a Swedish case study that youth participation in loosely structured leisure activities, such as those that take place at youth recreation centres, was associated with high levels of aggressive behaviour, alcohol/drug use, delinquency and crime. One CP representative argued in favour of youth recreation activities, while another highlighted the challenges of organizing such activities:

[I]t is very much about ... attitudes, ethics and behaviour issues. Sometimes I subscribe to the classic notion that it takes a community to raise a child. (Safety coordinator, high crime and new economy)

The first time we had [the festival] we thought it would be drug free ... and it did not work so well. We ended up with drunk people and/or drugs anyway. (Church representative, high crime, new economy)

Despite differences in organization, CP groups tackle youth problems by implementing similar types of projects and activities. There are no major differences between municipalities with relatively higher crime rates and those with less crime, although there are exceptions. Chronic addiction problems in the northern municipalities require a specific and ongoing constellation of experts in CP groups, which is found in the south more sporadically. More groups in the south state that they are dealing with ethnically motivated conflicts among youngsters than is the case in the northern case studies.

Seasonality problems impose a specific demand for CP work, requiring more concentrated actions during particular types of events or seasons. Not surprisingly, the southern high-crime, new-economy municipality reveals a high degree of cooperation in CP work with other municipalities, regions and organizations, including universities – which is an exception in comparison with all the case studies. The same applies to the northern high-crime municipality in preparation for the winter season. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the main characteristics of CP groups' activities in the eight study areas.

Final considerations

What does this study tell us about CP in rural Sweden? CP groups work in a more institutionalized way than previously expected. Partnerships are composed of a hard core of representatives from the municipality, the police and schools. Because of this institutionalized model, it is unclear to what extent these collaborations lead to actions capable of capturing the essence of local problems. Although problems may be locally anchored and each local response is largely driven by the local issue or problem prioritized by each CP organization itself, the way that the problem may sound is sometimes too standardized across the country. This homogeneity of CP is partially inherited from the traditional decentralized municipal planning system in Sweden. More importantly, it is also related to the structural changes imposed by *Allas vårt ansvar* after the mid-1990s on the work around local CP, which, with the best of intentions, provided a model for CP nationwide that was, and still is, too often taken for granted. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, having local enthusiasts working voluntarily as the main drivers of CP work is perhaps true in only one of the eight case studies. According to the analysis of our study areas, CP members commonly work several hours per month as part of their job.

There are indications that these groups are well prepared to address youth-related problems, but they face a number of challenges. They are working from their own professional perspective, which may hinder effective collaboration as a group. They cooperate across municipalities but work from their own professional area of expertise. According to CP members, their actions are hindered by their lack of 'the right skills' and by poor

Table 1. Youth-related problems and CP activities in the southern rural municipalities

Crime level	Economy	Case study	Problems	Local CP	Internal cooperation	External cooperation	Good examples	Situational CP	Evidence-based CP	CP challenges
High	New	Gotland	Youth isolation, violence, alcohol, drugs, vandalism, seasonal problems (spring/summer)	Yes (Trygg Gotland)	School, police, leisure activities, social services, health department, church, witness support association, Red Cross, Save the Children	Municipalities, region, national (e.g. university) and international	Underbara ungdomar project, 'theme weeks' at leisure home (Barnhus) associations, Varaman vatten project, safety walks	CCTV in schools, safety walks, invited lecturers, children's statistics	Limited, reports, crime statistics	Secrecy law, cooperation (seasonal problems), better CP organization, Internet crime, economic resources
	Old	Markaryd	Social disturbance, ethnic conflicts (anti-Semitic groups), burglary, drugs and alcohol, street racing, vandalism, seasonal problems (Markaryd marknad, summer)	Yes	School, police, leisure activities, social services, witness support association	Municipal, regional, national	Mopped project, Neighbourhood Watch	Safety walks, police, CCTV, Neighbourhood Watch schemes, Moppeprojekt	Police data, safety survey, survey by Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN)	Better cooperation between regional council and school
Low	New	Söderköping	Vandalism, car theft, youth violence, public disorder (playing chicken)	Yes	School, police, social services, child and youth care, municipality, tenants' association headed by a safety coordinator	Limited	Våga vara project, leisure associations, guards' reports, CCTV in schools, vandalism	Private guards, CCTV, police, safety walks	Limited, police data reports, safety surveys	Organization less dependent on a single actor, better cooperation, economic resources, drugs

Table 1. (Continued)

Crime level	Economy	Case study	Problems	Local CP	Internal cooperation	External cooperation	Good examples	Situational CP	Evidence-based CP	CP challenges
Old		Gnosjö	Vandalism, alcohol, drugs, youth violence, theft	Yes	Police, emergency services, social services, church, industry, senior citizens' association, Jämbärares	Limited, municipal and regional	Youth in risk zone', Coolt-projekt, Tjejmässan project, vuxenvandring project	CCTV in schools, safety walks, insurance company, crime prevention by design	Police data reports	Short-term projects, attract youngsters, Internet crime, practical actions on high perceived unsafety

Table 2. Youth-related problems and CP activities in the northern rural municipalities

Crime level	Economy	Case study	Problems	Local CP	Internal cooperation	External cooperation	Good examples	Situational CP	Evidence-based CP	CP challenges
High	New	Åre	Youth violence, alcohol, drugs (incl. illegal alcohol), graffiti, theft (winter)	No (but SamBU)	Police, social services, child and youth care, leisure activities, school, church	Municipal, regional	Rondellen project, Busstrafliken project, Fryshusen cooperation project, Aunt Anna's Café, STAD project	Police walks, cooperation with pubs	Limited, police data, reports at national level	Economic resources, better cooperation, better skills and knowledge
	Old	Arvika	Alcohol, drug consumption, youth violence, motorcycle gangs, domestic violence	Together with Karlstad's Centre for Crime Prevention	Police, social services (focus on violence against women), leisure activities, school, pubs, church, witness support organization	Municipal and regional, particularly with Karlstad	Skan project, Kommet projects, parent support (Samtal om Barn & ungdom), klass morfar project, support for reintegration of offenders in society	Parent and police walks, lectures in schools, CCTV reports	Limited, reports in police data, CCTV reports	Better consensus on goals of CP, economic resources for family interventions, measures that reach children and young people, more support from police and social services on action on drugs
Low	New	Storuman	Alcohol, drugs, criminal damage, youth violence, seasonal problems (winter), temporary labour force (summer, berry pickers), domestic violence	No (Frida-Linnea groups)	School, police, health care, psychiatric care, social services, child and mother care, church, women's shelter organization	Municipal, regional	Frida, Linnea, LINUS, Stad project (limited alcohol purchase), 'sick cottage', Storuman crime prevention model, Salut project	Parent support, invited lecturers in schools, CCTV projects, incl. mostly in private places	Limited, used in specific projects, incl. maps, drug use survey	Better contact with youngsters, liberal attitude towards alcohol use, limited economic resources, better engagement of representatives of each group
	Old	Dorotea	Theft, criminal damage, alcohol, violence between youngsters in school (incl. ethnic minorities), drugs, domestic violence	No (Samrådsgrupp)	Police, social services, leisure activities, school, child care, victim support organization, health care, church, study associations	Limited municipal and regional	Föräldrar på Byn project, Ungdomstjänst project, specific actions against drugs, TRIO project	Parental support, CCTV, invited lecturers in schools	Limited	Economic resources, secrecy law, better cooperation including regional council, improve skills of CP actors

cooperation between them. The Swedish legislation has to be rethought to allow information-sharing among those working on intervention with youngsters at risk. Fewer barriers (particularly data secrecy) between local authorities would allow early intervention. As was suggested by more than one-third of our interviewees, achieving *local cooperation in itself* has become the main goal of some these CP groups, which is, of course, problematic. Partnership should be a *means* to help CP work, not the *end*. It should lead CP groups to a better understanding of the problems with which they have to deal and their causes, and which specific local interventions should be put into practice.

CP groups in rural areas tend to prioritize urban problems. For example, a large majority of projects funded by BRÅ are in urban areas or, if they are based in rural municipalities, they still focus on issues that are more often found in large cities, such as youth violence. They tend also to be short-term projects. This distribution reflects a national top-down model of CP that identifies a number of target areas and establishes frameworks of actions, often focused on big cities' problems and ignoring rural diversity. This is further reinforced by a scheme of prizes awarded to CP projects assessed as 'best practice' following these guidelines, which may be replicated in other municipalities. Whether they make sense in a rural context is difficult to say, but it seems reasonable to expect that there is a need to re-examine the current model. Even if the causes of crime in rural areas are the same as those in urban areas, in-depth knowledge is necessary to tackle problems that are expressed differently depending on their location. Some are related to the degree of isolation and size of police districts; others to high alcohol and drug addiction rates; others struggle with high crime linked to long-term segregation; others deal with seasonality problems, to name a few. Using similar remedies (old models or importing new models), rural CPs aim at solving problems that are actually based on the diverse contexts in which crime happens. Equally important is knowledge about what works and what doesn't in terms of intervention in specific rural contexts. If any assessments are done, they tend to be simplistic, as hypothesized. Although these results are limited to these Swedish cases, the international literature shows that they are not alone: CP projects elsewhere are introduced and kept running even when they show no effect (Wikström, 2007).

If the future of CP work with young people relies on activities around youth leisure centres, a better understanding of these centres must be achieved. In the Swedish context, knowledge is needed about the nature and quality of these youth leisure centres and social activities. For instance, to what extent do they meet the needs of youth groups in contemporary rural environments and do they have any influence on individuals' predisposition to offend (particularly for those who are already at risk)?

It is equally important to consider other rural groups that so far have been underrepresented in CPs, such as farmers and other rural citizens. Police-recorded crime does not allow typical rural crimes to be easily identified and, so far, insurance companies, which may hold these records, have not been willing to provide them for research. Anecdotes are picked up by the press about large amounts of fertilizer and other suspicious chemicals being stolen. The same applies to environmental crimes. No one knows the precise magnitude of the problem, in part because of a lack of cooperation after the crime has been reported between the authorities responsible for dealing with this problem. The instruments and methods for the detection of crime are not sufficiently effective.

Environmental inspectors (who might detect the offence) cannot be expected to take over the role of the police as criminal investigators; so many cases never reach court. CP groups in each municipality should be aware of, and perhaps be more curious about, these events. To make things more difficult, some of these recorded environmental crimes are caused by sawmills and more traditional enterprises that have been part of the community for a long time and are now targeted by new environmental rules. Most people do not view their activities as crimes. In the future, victimization surveys should incorporate questions that are more appropriate for rural areas, with samples that allow meaningful analysis across rural municipalities and regions.

Crime, safety and the role of CP groups in rural areas must to be considered in a wider context. CP groups need to reflect upon the effects of the long-term relative deprivation and social exclusion of marginalized groups in their community and engage in actions that might hinder individuals' decision to engage in crime. This local work has to be synchronized with national social policies aiming at decreasing deprivation and the perception of a lack of life opportunities by youngsters. Equally relevant is to understand how relative deprivation and social exclusion affect victimization and overall declared levels of fear. CP groups in rural areas have little power to deal with structural changes but they cannot remain blind to them in their long-term work.

A model of a rural CP that takes into account the real needs in the countryside should capture the changing urban–rural relationships. They are currently being redefined as the use of ICTs makes crime less dependent on space. A recurrent concern of those working with drug addiction was the fact that drugs are easily sold over the Internet. ICTs can also be used to increase efficiency in crime detection and the reporting of criminal events. The use of CCTV to detect criminals on building sites or in forests, a common target of thefts in rural areas, is an example of how the technology can be used in areas where guardianship is low. The use of social media in community policing may be particularly important in rural areas because of the long distances. The powerful capacity of georeferencing social control by texting, voicing or imaging as crime happens is new in policing, but it is here to stay as a new expression of surveillance.

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Notes

1. It is important to note that, in some municipalities, CP groups are not necessarily called CP councils. Partnerships involve the work done by a range of agencies or/and individuals required to cooperate or participate in either planning or implementing CP interventions. They may be

called, for instance, 'Frida-Linnea group' or 'SafeGotland'. In this study, half of these CPs are of this type.

2. BRÅ – Brottssforebyggande radet is the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention.
3. In Sweden there are 21 police districts, representing 21 counties. The National Police distributes the state funds earmarked for the police among the various police forces, but each police district has a degree of independence from the National Police – a model that is currently under assessment.
4. See, for example, Polisen Halland, https://twitter.com/#!/polisen_halland.
5. For a definition of environmental crime, see, e.g., White (2009).
6. The list of projects can be found at <http://www.bra.se/>.
7. This was assessed by analysing their current initiatives through the face-to-face interview (Tables 1 and 2) and the email survey.

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