Introduction

Safety on the move: Crime and perceived safety in transit environments

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Transit environments are public places that individuals may use on a daily basis and are, therefore, important settings of everyday life: transit premises such as a train station, or transit modes, such as a bus, take individuals to their destinations. Getting individuals to use public transportation is not just a matter of making it convenient and cost effective. People need to feel safe too. Good planning should aim to make transit environments safe and comfortable for all. Safety is highly relevant as one in five employees in Europe spend at least an hour each way travelling to and from work.[1] This means many hours are spent in trains, buses or in transit, on the move. Are individuals safe while in transit? What affects safety in transit environments? Can they be made safer?

This special issue searches for answers to these questions in the environments of these transit settings and in the social interactions that may take place within them. Some of these interactions are unpleasant events such as being a victim of a crime. It is submitted here that the answers to these questions cannot only be derived from a field of science; it demands integrated and cross-disciplinary theories, which go beyond criminology or crime science. Just as an example, the special issue contains articles written by experts relying on knowledge stemming from sociology, epidemiology, psychology, criminology, geography, architecture and urban planning. Moreover, the better understanding of safety in transit environments also requires methods that are capable of guiding an ever-increasing volume of data, which constitutes the new frontier of research in urban safety and mobility. The special issue approaches transit safety by adopting a framework that is place centred (the station, the environments of bus stops, the neighbourhood, the trip across different environments) and user oriented (children, women, transit captives), taking some distance from the offender-offence dynamic. It intentionally opens up the issue of transit safety to a wider audience, by looking upon those who travel through the system, and who may, sometimes, become a victim of crime: the passengers.

Research on safety has shown that some of these transit environments are places of social convergence that are more prone to crime (see, for instance, Levine *et al*, 1986; Block and Davis, 1996; Clarke, 1996; LaVigne, 1997; Smith and Cornish, 2006), but not uniformly across the system. For instance, transport nodes, such as subway stations, are often called ‘crime generators’ and ‘crime attractors’ (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993, 1995) as they concentrate large flows of people and are social spaces, which makes it easier for offenders to commit crime. Some physical and social characteristics found at transport nodes may draw the attention of people with high levels of criminal motivation; they can potentially pull motivated offenders towards them. For instance, at certain times of the day, the crowds at a station may encourage the offender to pickpocket. In this special issue,

further light is shed on transport nodes as crime attractors and generators. First, is the example of thefts within and near to London's underground, described by the geographer/criminologist Andrew Newton and colleagues. Another case is based on a North American case in Henderson, Nevada. Criminologists Timothy Hart and Terance Miethe show that the role of bus stops as crime generators and/or attractors depends on particular combinations of other activity nodes that make up the physical backcloth of their proximate environments. In other words, it depends on the places' immediate land use and the routine activity (Cohen and Felson, 1979). Second, a new transportation node does not necessarily entail more crime. Evidence from a newly implemented light rail system in Jersey City, USA, indicates that the new system has not introduced non-local offenders to its constituent neighbourhoods, nor contributed with new targets to local offenders. This article written by the criminologist Christopher Sedelmaier is the only one in the special issue that deals with offender data. The author suggests that when dealing with offenders' mobility, there is a need to search for patterns of movement beyond the area of study.

Safety in a train or at subway stations, for instance, is dependent on multi-scale conditions that act at various levels in an urban environment. These conditions are determined by the environmental attributes of the station, the characteristics of the immediate environment, the type of neighbourhood in which the station is located and the relative position of both the station and its neighbourhood in the city (Loukaitou-Sideris *et al*, 2002; Ceccato, 2013). So far, most of this research has been dominated by North American and British case studies; therefore this special issue aims to open up this field of research to case studies from other contexts, such as transportation systems in Sweden and Japan. The urban planner Adriaan Uittenbogaard shows how opportunities for guardianship are affected by physical and social environments at underground stations in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. The author argues that although there is a vast literature on the impact of guardianship on crime (see, for instance, Reynald, 2011), little is known about how the opportunities to exercise guardianship are affected by the environment, and even less is known about the case of underground stations. In a much more demanding transportation system than the one found in Stockholm, the psychologist Seiji Shibata and colleagues assess the railway stations in Tokyo, Japan, in terms of riders' expectations and perceptions of crime and disorder events. Their findings show that the differences between the expected and experienced unpleasantness at stations were significant when it came to rare events, such as being a victim of a terrorist attack or a victim of crime. Although the suggestions for intervention in these two articles may not be the first ones in the literature, they are certainly new in terms of relying on findings from hypothesis testing from two distinct contexts: Japan and Sweden.

The special issue illustrates innovative methods on how transit safety research links the urban landscape with crime and perceived safety. This is relevant because crimes tend to occur in particular geographical areas in a city; they may occur at certain hours of the day and even in association with specific demographic, land use or socioeconomic aspects. Thus, how individuals experience these outdoor city environments is also space dependent. The epidemiologist Douglas Wiebe and colleagues show an example of a novel methodology that combines Geographical Information Systems with minute-to-minute experiences captured by a space–time diary of individuals' perceived safety in Philadelphia, USA. Unfortunately, current official records do not often offer the same type of accuracy as described in the Philadelphia study. Therefore, equally important is the testing of methods that can deal with these uncertainties when using available official statistics. The article by the geographer

Andrew Newton and colleagues is an example of these efforts, as they propose the use of Interstitial Crime Analysis to deal with location uncertainties in cases of pick pocketing in London underground stations. Another example is the study by the criminologists Sung-Suk Violet Yu and Martha Smith, which exemplifies how ecological data, available as secondary data, can be useful to identify the vulnerability of groups in New York City. A third example of a novel way of searching for robust patterns in crime data is the use of conjunctive analysis, as suggested by criminologists Timothy Hart and Terance Miethe in their study of bus stops in Henderson, Nevada, USA.

Regardless of how criminogenic transportation nodes actually are, there is a consensus that a completely safe journey, from door-to-door, is not easy to guarantee. The simple decision one takes to go, for example, from home to work implies a change in one's safety status, depending on how, when and where one moves. An individual's movement is affected by the fear of being exposed to an uncontrolled or unexpected danger, such as being a crime victim. Poor access to public transportation associated with segmented urban spaces that have differentiated levels of risk of crime and/or levels of fear of crime composes a challenge to ensure a safe journey from door-to-door. Safety requires a whole-journey approach, but this may mean different things depending on the context. In a study in New York, Sung-suk Violet Yu and Martha Smith identify those users who are most in need in terms of vulnerability to crime-target opportunities within the context of public transit use, that is, 'transit captives', such as the poor and/or elderly, as their mobility is limited to access to public transportation. The needs of transit captives echo the voices of other groups that should be heard such children/young people and women. Douglas Wiebe and colleagues investigate young people's perceived safety from assault risk while in different transportation modes, while the article by the architect Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris argues for the need to incorporate a gender perspective into safety in transportation policies. The main challenge ahead, as many would agree, goes beyond technical solutions when providing safe transportation services. There is a need to envisage transportation services that can be adapted to the safety and mobility needs of different users, thereby viewing safe mobility as an *individual right*, to be attained by all, regardless of the individual's gender, age, abilities or resources.

This special issue finalises with a 'golden lock' that is gently shaped by Paul Ekblom's final article. With a bird's-eye view and a magnifier glass in his pocket, Ekblom's article summarises the main contributions presented here and identifies the challenges the field has ahead both in research and in practice.

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Note

1 A measure based on a survey with employees in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden; StepStone (2012).

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