

'Powers, Liabilities and Expertise in Community Safety: Comparative Lessons from the UK and Republic of Ireland'

One-day Research Colloquium

Sponsored by the Journal of Law
and Society

JOURNAL OF
LAW AND SOCIETY

The Centre for Crime, Law and Justice

Cardiff University, 2 November 2012



KEY-NOTE SPEAKERS:

Matt Bowden (*Dublin Institute of Technology*)

Adam Edwards (*Cardiff University*)

Daniel Gilling (*University of Plymouth*)

Alistair Henry (*University of Edinburgh*)

Gordon Hughes (*Cardiff University*)

John Topping (*University of Ulster*)

Nicholas Lord (*Cardiff University*)

DISCUSSANT:

Karen Evans (*University of Liverpool*)

CHAIR:

Rachel Swann (*Cardiff University*)

Key aims of the colloquium

This one-day colloquium offers the first comparative criminological and socio-legal analysis of both current and prospective developments in community safety across the principal polities in the islands of Britain and Ireland. Alongside the recognition of and acuity to the different geo-histories of these territories, particular attention is given to contextualising these developments in the ongoing processes of devolution in the UK, inter-state relations in Ireland as well as changing relations with the European Union across both islands. Each of the keynote speakers is an acknowledged research expert on community safety politics and policy in their respective localities as well as being attuned to the broader international debates on the politics of prevention, safety and security. Community safety addresses problems that are local in manifestation if not necessarily in causality. Its gaze falls upon specific localities whilst there tend to be contestation with regard to the appropriate balance of local and national priorities around safety and security. It is widely recognized that community safety is a contested terrain (not least given its conceptual elasticity) that nonetheless possesses certain ideal typical characteristics, all of which are themselves the subjects of contestation. These include the afore-mentioned localism, problem-orientation, basis in partnership working, and multiplicity of goals and means of attaining them. In exploring comparatively the geo-histories of England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, one of the aims in the colloquium is to make an original and quite specific contribution to the larger and ongoing project of developing comparative criminological and socio-legal scholarship attuned and sensitive to the internal variegation and diversity of these islands. It aims to do this by highlighting what are the specific features of community safety policy and their trajectories in each polity alongside comparing what are the shared and generic tendencies at play across these territories.

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Key aims of the colloquium cont.

In examining what is generally termed community safety and/or crime prevention in the 'Anglophone' world, it has often been assumed in critical academic accounts that the UK stands apart from much of mainland Europe both in terms of its preferred approaches to community safety and crime prevention and the underlying dominant political ideologies which determine developments in this still relatively new policy field. Of course the words UK and Britain have generally meant *de facto* England with only limited recognition of the other countries and regions of the UK. In turn the criminological analysis of community crime prevention in the Republic of Ireland has been under-researched with some recent and notable exceptions strangely muted. This colloquium thus seeks to open up and foreground the comparative debate on community safety and the 'preventive turn' across the nations and regions of the UK and Republic of Ireland and thus move beyond the 'national frame' deployed in so much criminological and socio-legal research and commentary.

Put simply, the Anglophone model of crime prevention and community safety (often encompassing North America and the UK) is coded, if not caricatured, in most contemporary 'critical' social scientific commentary as a politico-ideological admixture of moralistic communitarianism and neo-liberalism abetted by the new statecraft of managerialism. Such analyses of broad shift across nations are viewed widely in the critical academy as being underpinned in the UK case by the centrally-driven culture of performance targets linked to the institutional architecture of statutory partnerships which in turn are largely driven by situational crime prevention techniques and ultimately backed by repressive and exclusionary punitive measures. Like most stereotypes there is some grain of truth in these broad generalisations and attendant grand narratives. However, their explanatory salience is undermined in large measure when we pay due attention to the divergent as well as convergent tendencies both inter-nationally and intra-nationally across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

It will be suggested that the caricatured 'neo-liberal Anglophone model' of crime control and community safety has proven in large measure to be unhelpful in promoting what is a superficial and homogenous account, particularly with regard to the UK. Evidence regarding the inter-regional and international nuances in crime prevention and community safety destabilise this homogenous narrative. Destabilising forces include, *inter alia*, the political ideology of social democracy and its extant traditions, religious sectarianism and the pull of faith identities, distinct elite political and policy cultures and institutions of civil society, contrasting rural/urban geographies and political economies, and of course nationalist mobilisations (including the development of new institutional and cultural resources encouraged by the growth of devolution across the 'smaller' nations of the UK).

There are now emergent, complex patterns of multi-level governance in crime control generally and community safety more specifically created by the ongoing forms of devolution in the UK which have been ignored largely by the growing political science literature on devolution. It is likely that these will encourage new types of relationship and policy transfer between neighbouring nations and not least that of the closest neighbour to the UK, both geographically and culturally, the Republic of Ireland. It is of course a mute point to what extent Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales increasingly differ and diverge from England in terms of both policy making processes and outcomes and the extent to which adaptations to the increasingly austere climate of public expenditure in these states further promotes local variation. What are the consequences of the asymmetrical and temporally uneven nature of the UK's devolving institutions for the ensemble of safety and preventive policies and practices that both exist and are emergent across these polities? In turn the question of how and in what ways is the Republic's policy making processes and outcomes in the field of prevention and safety are distinct from that of developments across and between the parts of the UK is hard to say given the paucity of comparative empirical inquiry across the two islands. The colloquium will place these questions centre-stage to a degree not previously attained in any comparative criminological inquiry.

Key foci of the colloquium

This colloquium explores in depth the nature of both *current* and *prospective* ‘problems’, ‘responsibilities’, and ‘expertise’ which emerge in the often newly minted institutional spaces and professional practices in community safety in the respective polities under scrutiny. In the first part of the colloquium the following current issues are addressed *in* each polity by the key note speakers:

1. What can community safety mean?
2. What are the current ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’ challenges for managing community safety in these particular regional and national contexts?
3. Who is currently responsible for managing community safety?
4. What expertise and training currently equips these authorities to respond to these problems?

In the second part of the colloquium the following prospective issues are addressed *across* the five polities in a roundtable discussion involving the key-note speakers:

1. What are the potential challenges for managing community safety in the coming decade?
2. Who ought to be responsible for managing community safety?
3. What expertise ought to be entailed in this response?
4. How might this expertise be best developed in educational and training pro-

The exploration of these questions alert us in turn to broader questions associated with the study of policy as enacted and negotiated performance, such as ‘how are problems understood and responses and solutions sought?’; ‘who is involved in terms of authority and responsibility, and how does this shape the policy field?’; and ‘what is the nature of both current and prospective expertise in the field?’ The debate in this colloquium thus seeks to move beyond the representational and retrospective understanding of the field (‘what has been and what is’) and aims also to raise normative questions regarding what ought to be the powers, liabilities and expertise in community safety across the divergent localities both in the UK and Republic of Ireland and more generally for nations, regions and localities across the globe. Where should power and responsibility lie? And what types of knowledge and expertise are best mobilized for the realization of both evidence-based and democratic strategic problem-solving? These concerns evoke Weber’s distinction between politics and science as distinct vocations but which we contend must also include the issue of ‘administration’ as another competing vocation with powers and liabilities to be recognized. Crime control policy is of course a field which epitomizes the tensions between the rival claims and demands of populist and electoral politics and those of scientific and expert knowledge. What is the nexus between policy and research in the five polities under scrutiny? The debates raised thus seek to make a distinctive contribution to what has been termed ‘public criminology’ and the role of both academic analysis and intervention in political and policy debate.

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Timetable of the colloquium (10.30-17.00, Friday 2 November)

1. Registration and coffee

2. Introduction

- **Community Safety meets Urban Security in Europe:** Comparative criminology and the Delphi method

3. Morning session: 'The state (and states) we are in'

- Individual briefing papers on current 'state of the art' of community safety and partnership working in the five polities particularly in the context of the public funding crisis: Bowden on the Republic of Ireland; Edwards and Hughes on Wales; Gilling on England; Henry on Scotland; and Topping on Northern Ireland.
- Roundtable debate with discussant on current comparisons and differences and processes of convergence and divergence.
- 'Open Mike': Questions and discussion with delegates.

4. Afternoon session: 'The futures of community safety expertise'

- Roundtable discussion of forms of expertise and problem-solving which are both likely to inform and ought to inform this policy field in the next decade and the role of social science in contributing to this public debate.
- 'Open Mike': Questions and discussion with delegates.

5. Wine reception and networking

Location

Committee Room 1

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Endnotes:

1. Unlike continental Europe where the terminology deployed tends to be that of 'public safety' or 'urban security'.

2. The challenges for managing community safety can be divided for heuristic purposes into endogenous challenges, which come from the nature of community safety itself, and exogenous challenges, which arise from the wider environment in which community safety is practiced, most notably, in the current context, the political-economic pressures arising from sovereign debt and economic stagnation.