RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Malmö City Problem-Oriented-Policing-Project on Micro Crime Places

By

Magnus Andersson, Analyst & Daniel Malmgren, Detective Officer, Skåne County Police, Malmö Police Department, Sweden

Abstract

Malmö police department has undertaken an innovative approach to its crime prevention work. An implemented problem-oriented policing project at identified micro crime places showed a significant decrease in crime by 28% in the target area and a 23% decrease in the project area’s buffer zones. This result comes from a targeted measurement of displacement and possible diffusion of benefits.

Keywords: problem oriented policing project, micro crime places, problem places, targeted measurement of displacement and diffusion of benefits

The policing of problem places

The importance of place isn’t unknown in policing, although it must be considered unexplored within the context of Swedish policing. Building on the foundations of routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979) and crime pattern theory (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993), the research of David L Weisburd about the importance of place in policing earned him the Stockholm Prize in Criminology 2010. Policing of problem places takes the existence of temporally stable hot spots as its starting point (Weisburd et al., 2010) and the crime triangle as the model of analysis and responses (Weisburd and Braga, 2010). With the help of the crime triangle the places, offenders and victims of crime are identified as well as the place managers, handlers and guardians who can respond to the crime problem (Weisburd and Braga, 2010).

Furthermore, the temporal stability of hot spots makes the place a stable point of intervention for the police. A study conducted by Weisburd in Seattle showed that 50% of the crime within the city was reported on only 4.5% of the street junctions, in hot spots that were stable over time (Weisburd et al., 2010). During a period of 14 years there was a 20%
reduction in crime that was concentrated in 14% of the street junctions in the city, emphasising the importance of smaller street segments, junctions, squares and parts of neighborhoods as the target of police intervention. The study emphasised that crime is stable over time at smaller street segments, and that overall crime reduction is concentrated to a small amount of previously stable micro hot spots (Weisburd et al., 2004).

By shifting focus from person to place, on the analytical level and on the design of intervention, the police effort is focused on disrupting the activity space of the criminal, thereby denying the offender the opportunity to commit a crime. On the analytical level the place becomes the starting point and main focus of the analysis. For the police intervention, control and management of the place becomes the main objective. The situations that arise out of the coincidence of offenders and victims activity spaces and the underlying conditions of the place becomes the main target of the police effort (Weisburd and Braga, 2010).

With the development of situational crime prevention the problem-oriented policing model has evolved since its foundation by Herman Goldstein in 1979. The model, which strives to make police departments move away from the standard model of policing, emphasises that responses to crime problems should be thoroughly analysed and interventions aimed at underlying conditions that give rise to the problem. Problem-oriented policing should follow the steps of the SARA-process: Scanning (problem identification and definition), Analysis (data collection and collation to create understanding), Response (response design and implementation), Assessment (re-examination and evaluation of the problem and response) (Weisburd and Braga 2010; Ratcliffe, 2008). High activity crime places usually involve multiple problems, creating a complex mix of crime types (Weisburd and Braga, 2010). This condition tends to make problem-oriented policing challenging when faced with high activity crime places (ibid).

When applying problem-oriented policing on the policing on problem places, the aim of crime analysis is to identify those places that continuously show up as hot-spots and determine the causes of the problem. Thereafter the response has to focus accordingly on the causes of the problem and the dynamics that give rise to it. In the implementation of problem-oriented policing responses, the strategy and tactics can be either enforcement-oriented or oriented towards situational prevention, or both (Weisburd and Braga, 2010). Enforcement-oriented responses can include directed patrols and crackdowns, while situational prevention can include alternative responses, such as community engagement and collaboration with local partners (ibid).

Scanning and analysis of Sevedsplan
The purpose of the Malmö Police department with this problem-oriented policing project was to test place-based policing, too see if the theories were applicable to the local environment within the city. The first step in any problem-oriented policing project is the scanning phase. It had been known to the police for quite some time that Svedsplan was an area of large crime problems as well as fear of crime. Furthermore, the residential area was geographically isolated from other distinct problem areas, making an evaluation of the effort easier and more reliable, as spill-over effects from adjacent areas could be expected to be low. The crime prognosis also indicated that November was expected to have the most reported crime during the whole year, which also contributed to the decision to choose Svedsplan as the target area.

Svedsplan is a fairly small residential area within Södra Innerstaden, one of ten districts within Malmö municipality. The residential area is no more than 200 x 400 meters and consists of several family apartment houses, a small square and there are several smaller shops located on the ground floors of the apartment buildings in the area. Out of the 4451 inhabitants, about 65% have a foreign background, which is higher than the average in Malmö municipality. The area is characterised by the inhabitants’ multi-cultural background, with the largest communities coming from Iraq, the former Yugoslav republic, Poland and Somalia. Of the ninth grade students, 40% didn’t reach the national qualification standard in maths and 56% didn’t reach the national qualification standard in Swedish, in 2009. The disposable income in the area is about 52000 SEK below municipality average and 200 households are dependent upon economic support throughout the year. Svedsplan is in a district which has one of the highest levels of fear of crime in Sweden.

The analysis of the micro crime places at Svedsplan was conducted in three steps:

1) Analysis of the spatio-temporal pattern of crime in the area
2) Analysis of the micro places that contributed to the crime problem
3) Analysis of the potential targets within the criminal environment that were active at the micro places

**Spatio-temporal pattern**

Crime at Svedsplan and its adjacent residential areas had been fairly stable during the last four years. To determine the geographical stability of crime patterns in the area, the geographical mean, median and center of minimum distance was analysed. The use of the three centro-graphic statistics shows the tendency in the crime data and can point towards the point where all crime is centered (Levine, 2004). By following the centro-graphic statistics movement over time, possible movement of hot spots can be detected (Chainey and Ratcliffe
2005; LeBeau 1987). The analysis of Sevedsplan showed that all of the centro-graphic statistics, mentioned above, moved less than 100 meters from 2006 - 2009. Therefore, the conclusion was drawn that hot spots in the area could be considered to be stable, as well as specific problem places.

According to the crime prognosis LUPP (Local monitoring and prognosis procedure; BRÅ 2001:13) the highest seasonal crime rates were expected in October and November in Sevedsplan. A further kernel density hot spots analysis of Sevedsplan, showed that crime was concentrated to three junctions within the residential area and one junction outside of the residential area. The three junctions within the residential area were situated on three sides of one residential quarter. One of the junctions (Rasmusgatan/Sofiagatan) was a part of the road on which most crime and disturbances in the area were reported, and was therefore considered to be more important than the other two junctions. The problems included stone and egg throwing at residents, personal robberies and assaults by multiple assailants.

One of the crime facilitators was found to be a local grocery store with very long opening hours, serving as a focal point for local youth engaged in criminal behaviour. There was also an old café that was closed, but its outdoor seating could still be used, which at least if the weather permitted could be used by local criminal youth.

With a high number of reported crimes and a high frequency of crimes (Clarke and Eck, 2006), the junction could be considered to be a crime attracting place. The response would therefore need to discourage youth to gather in the area in the short run, and in the long run the factors attracting the youth would need to be changed. Furthermore, residents who opposed the youth, trying to correct them, who lived close to the junction also became targets of crime, further complicating the situation around the junction.

The junction outside of the residential area (Rolfsagatan/Bragegatan) is situated in such a manner that it is a natural spot to pass by when you are walking or bicycling towards the city center or towards the local elementary school. This is probably a contributing factor in making the junction a problem place. It is mostly personal robberies, assaults and vandalism reported around the junction. A comparison of perpetrators at the first junction in Sevedsplan and at the junction outside of Sevedsplan, confirmed that is was to a large extent the same youth, who operated in the area. Furthermore, a bicycle path (Heleneholmsstigen) passed by very close to the junction contributing to the criminal problem. Thereby, the junction could be used as the pick-up point for personal robberies and purse snatchings conducted along the bicycle path. The junction had a high crime rate but with a low frequency, making it a
crime creating place (Clarke and Eck, 2006). The bicycle path on the other hand had a high rate of crime and a high frequency, which reinforced the notion that the junction worked as a pick-up point for crime.

A temporal analysis, using a day-of-the-week/time-of-the-day diagram, (Chainey and Ratcliffe, 2006; Helms 1999) showed that crime was most frequent as follows below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working days</th>
<th>Weekend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07:45-09:30</td>
<td>00:00-01:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00-18:00</td>
<td>18:00-20:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22:00-00:00</td>
<td>22:00-00:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that most crime happens prior to and after school during the working days of the week. In the spare time most of the crime is concentrated to late evening both during working days and weekends.

**Offenders**

An analysis of active criminal offenders in the area was also conducted. The results showed that a loosely connected group of youth offenders were the most criminal active in the area. Furthermore, several of them had been suspected of personal robberies and assaults in and around the four junctions. The most common crimes of the group were narcotics, personal robberies, burglary and assaults, showing a similarity to the crime at the problem places. The youth were also those who had been suspected of crimes against the residents who had opposed them. The number of youths in the group varied from five - 20 over time. Six influential prolific offenders were identified all between 17 - 20 years of age, all of whom had conducted numerous crimes before. Furthermore, among them the six influential prolific offenders had several ties to criminals active in serious organized crime, which probably contributed to their position of power within the loosely connected group of offenders.

**Implemented measures**

The level of focus was on the identified micro crime places (Braga and Weisburd, 2010; Eck and Weisburd, 1995) which received treatment in line with contemporary research on effective policing with a diversity of approaches (Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Weisburd et al., 2010). Mainly, the police used hot spots policing in combination with so called third-party policing (Weisburd and Braga (eds), 2006) where representatives from Malmö municipality took an active part in the crime prevention work. Identified hot times facilitated the crime prevention process (Helms, 1999; Ratcliffe, 2002).
In light of a study by Smith, Clarke and Pease (2002) anticipatory benefits were pursued by announcing the up-coming intensified police presence in the local bulletin for the neighborhood where the measures were to be implemented. In addition, with the help of the municipality, the neighborhoods’ streetlights where changed to reduce the fear of crime and reach additional crime prevention value (Ramsay, 1991; Pease, 1999).

**Methodology**

The project was implemented with regard to a targeted measurement of displacement and possible diffusion of benefits (Hamilton-Smith, 2002). With a non-experimental design, a process and impact evaluation was undertaken. With regard to the project areas’ socio-demographic characteristics, a control area was chosen for the evaluation (Eck, 2002; English et al., 2002). Both the project and control areas’ “buffer-zones” where clearly defined and measured.

**Results**

Using the median of the last three years’ reported offenses with regard to the following crime-categories: thefts, violence and crimes inflicting damage on property, a prognosis of the anticipated reports on the above mentioned crime-categories was compared to actual reported crimes for the time of project implementation. A 28 % decline in reported offenses in the project area and a 23 % decline in the project area’s buffer-zones were measured, both results statistically significant ($p < .05$). When compared to the control area and the city of Malmö in general no such declines could be measured.

Also, a self-report survey measuring the public’s fear of crime is undertaken yearly in the county of Skåne. The survey’s results post-project implementation measured an increase in the sense of safety and a decrease in the fear of crime in the project area, as well as in the project area’s “buffer-zones”, this in comparison to the results of the survey pre-project implementation.

**Lessons learned**

The impact evaluation showed the above mentioned results. To the authors’ knowledge this is the first evaluation in the Swedish context of a problem-oriented policing project at micro crime places, with regard to a targeted measurement of displacement and possible diffusion of benefits.

The process evaluation showed that the police department of Malmö has a long way to go when it comes to documenting its measures. A conclusion which is supported by an audit on a national level of the Swedish Police Crime Prevention work made by the Swedish National Audit Office (RiR 2010:23). Also, guidelines could be established for coming projects which is now underway.
References:


Pease, Ken. “ A Review of Street Lighting Eval-