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What is This?
Powers, liabilities and expertise in community safety: Comparative lessons for ‘urban security’ from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland

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Abstract
This paper begins by outlining and critiquing what we term the dominant anglophone model of neo-liberal community safety and crime prevention. As an alternative to this influential but flawed model, a comparative analysis is provided of the different constitutional-legal settlements in each of the five jurisdictions across the UK and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), and their uneven institutionalization of community safety. In the light of this it is argued that the nature of the
anglophone community safety enterprise is actually subject to significant variation. Summarizing the contours of this variation facilitates our articulation of some core dimensions of community safety. Then, making use of Colebatch’s (2002) deconstruction of policy activity into categories of authority and expertise, and Brunsson’s (2002) distinction between policy talk, decisions and action, we put forward a way of understanding policy activity that avoids the twin dangers of ‘false particularism’ and ‘false universalism’ (Edwards and Hughes, 2005); that indicates a path for further empirical enquiry to assess the ‘reality’ of policy convergence; and that enables the engagement of researchers with normative questions about where community safety should be heading.

Keywords
Authority, community safety, comparative criminology, constitutional-legal settlements, expertise, uneven institutionalization, urban security

Introduction
This paper offers the first comparative analysis of developments in community safety and the governance of urban security across the five jurisdictions of the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Alongside the recognition of, and insight into, the different geo-histories of these territories, particular attention is given to contextualizing these developments in terms of their specific constitutional-legal ‘settlements’. In exploring comparatively the different policy trajectories and institution-building processes across the five jurisdictions, a key aim of the paper is to contribute to the larger and ongoing project of developing comparative social scientific scholarship attuned and sensitive to both the internal variegation and the commonalities at play unevenly in community safety policy, politics and practice and the ‘preventive turn’ across the UK and the ROI.

Unsettling the anglophone model of crime prevention and community safety
In examining what is generally termed ‘community safety’ and/or ‘crime prevention’ in the anglophone world, it has often been assumed in European criminological accounts that the UK stands apart from much of mainland Europe in terms of both its preferred approaches to the ‘preventive turn’ and the underlying dominant political ideologies that in large measure shape developments in this relatively new policy field. More dramatically, the UK’s preventive turn is also widely interpreted as a worrying harbinger for mainland Europe of ‘a significant drift over time towards more authoritarian and neoliberal influenced policies as investments in welfare and social inclusion have waned’ (Crawford, 2009: xxv). Of course, the words ‘United Kingdom’ and ‘Britain’ have generally meant de facto England in much commentary on the British experiment with regard to the preventive turn. This portrayal of a generic UK model of community safety is, like other stereotypes, lacking in empirical accuracy and often serves to close off further investigation, treating the UK as the ‘other’ against which continental European public safety can be juxtaposed. This has had the unfortunate consequence (with some exceptions – Edwards and Hughes, 2009; Henry, 2009) of there being very limited recognition of the other countries and regions of the UK in international debates on crime prevention.
and community safety. In turn, the nature of crime prevention and local crime control in the ROI has been under-researched, with notable exceptions (Bowden, 2006; Mulcahy, 2012). This paper thus seeks to open up and foreground the comparative debate on the ‘preventive turn’ across the nations and regions of the UK and the ROI.

Like most synoptic overviews there is much that is compelling in grand narratives of neo-liberal hegemony, in this case with regard to the ‘preventive turn’ and local crime control. However, it is suggested that the neo-liberal anglophone model of community safety has proven in large measure to be unhelpful in promoting what is an overly homogeneous account with regard to the countries and localities of the UK. Evidence regarding the interregional, international and intra-national nuances in crime prevention and community safety questions this homogeneous narrative. Destabilizing forces include, inter alia, the continued salience of social democracy and its extant ideological traditions, religious sectarianism and the pull of faith identities, distinct national elite political and legal cultures and institutions of civil society, variegated local cultures of control, contrasting rural/urban geographies and political economies, and nationalist and post-colonialist mobilizations.

There are now emergent, complex patterns of multi-level governance in crime control and community safety created by the ongoing forms of devolution in the UK, which have been strangely ignored by the political science literature on devolution (see the UK Economic and Social Research Council’s Devolution and Constitutional Change research programme, ESRC, 2006). It is likely that these emergent patterns will encourage new types of relationship and policy transfer between these neighbouring nations, including the UK’s closest neighbour, geographically and culturally, the ROI. It is, of course, a moot point to what extent Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales increasingly differ and diverge from England in terms of policy-making processes and to what extent adaptations to the increasingly austere climate of public expenditure in these states will further promote or diminish local variation. In turn the question of how and in what ways the Republic’s policy-making processes and outcomes in this field (as a late developer compared with much of the UK) are distinct from developments across and between the parts of the UK is hard to determine, given the paucity of comparative empirical enquiry to date.

**Constitutional-legal settlements: Convergence and difference**

In this section the different settlements in each jurisdiction are discussed in a broad-brush overview. As will become apparent, this overview helps to advance the argument that these spatio-temporal variations confirm the fallacy of the monolithic neo-liberal stereotype of the so-called anglophone community safety enterprise.³

**England and Wales**

The development of the policy field of community safety in England and in large measure Wales (see below) has been widely charted in previous commentary and may be said to represent one of the most famous, long-term experiments in multi-agency crime
prevention across the world (Gilling, 2007). Put briefly, it is possible to identify three broad phases: the ‘voluntary’ (1982–97), the ‘national mandatory’ (1998–2010), and the still unfolding ‘localized and devolved’ (2010 onwards). An unpacking of the constituent elements of these phases makes clear the contested and unstable nature of this policy terrain.

In England and Wales (and we should add Scotland) the emergence of ‘community safety’ strategies in the ‘voluntary’ phase signified a ‘reaction discourse’ initially among radical left local authorities against a relatively narrow definition, led by the police and central government, of what is to be prevented (recordable crimes) and how (situational measures for reducing the opportunities for specific crimes to be commissioned). Counterpoised to this, community safety also identified various environmental influences upon the perception and experience of safety (such as leisure and educational provision for young people) and entailed interventions beyond the expertise of the police (such as employment, training and education schemes, youth work).

The establishment of local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) following the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) in the ‘national mandatory’ phase in England and Wales represented both a regression to the relatively narrow focus on recordable crimes and an innovative focus on behaviour, especially of young people, that may not be liable to criminal prosecution but is nonetheless considered ‘anti-social’. This behavioural focus on incivilities of the young and measures to prevent persistent offending in large measure but not entirely eclipsed social democratic interventions in local structures of social inequality and exclusion that had previously been pursued by certain municipal authorities. More positively, arising out of the shift from ad hoc voluntary to statutory partnership working, this phase saw the local institutionalization of multi-agency teams and new offices of community safety officers and managers who played a key role in coordinating the work of the statutory and responsible public authorities and thus in establishing new and distinct forms of community safety expertise (see Hughes and Gilling, 2004). Such an institutionalization tended both to be highly dependent upon central government project funding and to be locally variable, ranging from extensive bureau-professional multi-agency teams established in some of the higher-crime cities and London boroughs, through to no more than single-person operations in some of the lower-crime rural districts.

In the third phase – the ‘localized and devolved’, which is still unfolding – there remains great uncertainty regarding the topography in which community safety now operates. Economic crisis and governmental change have occasioned harsh public expenditure cutbacks, seriously threatening the sustainability of what was already regarded by many agencies as a relatively peripheral area of activity. The cutbacks may work in the same way as performance management frameworks, generating a centripetal force that encourages a focus on ‘core business’ and therefore a climate that is less supportive of partnership working in peripheral areas. The stricture that public services are expected now to ‘do more with less’ may tilt the balance in what are now renamed community safety partnerships (CSPs) more in the direction of voluntary and community sector bodies, which may be more cost-effective than statutory alternatives. Indeed, in some areas the CSP model has been effectively abandoned as cash-strapped local authorities seek only minimal compliance with Section 17 of the CDA, which legally requires
local authorities to mainstream crime and disorder reduction across their routine and core activities. Alongside expenditure cutbacks, the current Coalition government has articulated a somewhat ambiguous vision of ‘the big society’, which implies a much greater role for the voluntary and community sectors. Although contracting may provide the most likely way of managing relationships with the third sector, the engagement of the community sector establishes a networked governance that is more complex and multi-layered.

A key political challenge across England and Wales takes the shape of the new Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) elected into position in November 2012. PCCs are elected in each of the 42 police force areas of England and Wales except the Metropolitan Police area. Their primary role is to facilitate the local governance of policing (this is the role of the Mayor of London in the case of the Metropolitan Police), but crucially they have been given responsibility not only for police budgets, but also for the depleted community safety budget previously administered from central government through its abolished regional government offices. What is unclear at present are the considerations that will guide this role. There are concerns that PCCs will succumb to populist political pressure that will result in them deploying resources first and foremost for reactive, old-fashioned police-led ‘crime-fighting’. In this eventuality many of the progressive multi-agency-based, preventive gains made over the last 15 years could be vulnerable to reversal. At their most extreme, then, the current economic and political challenges across England (and to a large extent Wales) offer a substantial threat to the future of community safety expertise: the financial constraints and the possibility that new PCCs will bypass local-authority-based CSPs to commission services from the third sector could mean that much of the institutional architecture and accumulated expertise of the past decade and a half could be dismantled in a worst-case scenario.

The constitutional-legal context of community safety work in Wales is exceptional because, unlike in any other of the constituent nations of the UK, responsibilities for this work are only partly devolved. Much of the above scenario is thus likely to have significant reverberations in Wales as well as England. Nonetheless, the post-Devolution settlement has also generated a distinctive policy agenda for safer communities in Wales and one that evolved out of a particular set of power relations that are of broader significance for the political analysis of public safety policies. Although responsibility for policing and criminal justice policy remains centralized in the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice for England and Wales, responsibility for other policies acknowledged as key to the promotion of safer communities, such as health, education and social services, has been devolved to the Welsh government since 1999. Post-Devolution, the Welsh government has used this constitutional settlement to promote a particularly distinctive ‘social justice’ policy agenda for community safety as epitomized in the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy, which explicitly privileges the welfare and entitlements of young people over ‘criminal justice’ and ‘risk management’ responses to youth crime and disorder. Another key event in the articulation of this agenda was the rejection of the ‘anti-social behaviour orders’ promoted by the national government in Westminster, depicted by the Welsh policy elite as a regressive, ‘low trust’ response to the social exclusion of young people. Conversely, the Welsh government used its flagship programmes, the Safer Communities Fund and the Substance Misuse Action Fund, which together
accounted for over two-thirds of the grant-aid received by CSPs, to cultivate a more inclusive, reintegrative approach that foregrounds the role of schools, health authorities and youth services (Edwards and Hughes, 2009). Since the election of the Coalition government at Westminster in 2010, however, this settlement has been further complicated by the provision for elected PCCs, and consequently the policy agenda for community safety in Wales is now subject to the competing electoral mandates of the Coalition government, the Welsh government and the PCCs. It is vital to consider the possible impacts of this settlement on the evolving policy agenda, specifically the prospects for the Welsh government’s promotion of social justice and the extent to which there may be greater policy agenda convergence or divergence between England and Wales in the next decade.

Scotland

The institutional infrastructure of community safety (and partnership working more generally) developed in Scotland in ways that were both similar to and different from that elsewhere in the British Isles. The ‘voluntary’ period in which partnership working emerged out of urban regeneration work and, latterly, experiments such as Safer Cities, looks very similar to developments elsewhere, with a steady increase in local government activity and central government exhortation, guidance and monitoring, much of which might be best characterized as largely being at the level of policy talk (Henry, 2009). However, it is notable that, although the CDA and the raft of partnership working guidance emanating from the Home Office would be very influential in Scotland, they did not mark the beginning of the ‘mandatory’ period of community safety’s evolution in this jurisdiction. Rather, Scotland’s ‘legislative moment’, in which a formal partnership apparatus for managing local public service provision was erected, happened later and under a different agenda. Community safety partnerships were not made statutory under the CDA in Scotland. The ‘mandatory’ moment arrived with the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, which established Community Planning – a broader agenda about enhancing the holistic provision of public services under which community safety partnerships would sit, and be coordinated within a much broader set of themed partnerships (Henry, 2009).

The apparent divergence between Scotland and England had long been a possibility through the nature of the constitutional settlement of the Act of Union (McAra, 2004). However, that said, the framing of mandatory partnership working under an agenda that encompassed but was not defined by crime, disorder, safety and security was not entirely distinctive to Scotland. In England and Wales a version of Community Planning was evident in the establishment in unitary and county-level local authorities of local strategic partnerships as ‘über-partnerships’ under whose umbrella CSPs sat, thereby placing crime within a broader agenda of community governance that also incorporated areas such as health, education and employment (see Gilling, 2007). Scottish distinctiveness perhaps lies in the fact that such structures have, for the moment at least, survived the imposed retrenchments and reforms of the Coalition government.

Further, Scottish distinctiveness marks the more recent period under reflection in this paper, where austerity and economic reform pose questions about the future shape of
partnership working in particular and urban security more generally. If anything, political differences between Scotland and England might be seen to have been symbolically intensified with the election of the Scottish National Party to government (in a system designed to create coalition) in Holyrood and a Conservative–Lib-Dem coalition at Westminster. Their different rhetoric around issues of security is illustrated with reference to recent reforms of the structure and organization of public policing (Fyfe and Henry, 2012). In contrast to the election of PCCs in England and Wales, reform in Scotland, for better or worse, continues to emphasize the importance of efficient public bureaucracies in the delivery of public services (see Christie Commission, 2011), in this case through the amalgamation of Scotland’s eight regional forces into a single national organization by April 2013. The police mission, articulated in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, is one that continues to emphasize the broader Community Planning agenda and a commitment to partnership working:

the main purpose of policing is to improve the safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities in Scotland . . . working in collaboration with others. . . . accessible to, and engaged with, local communities, and promotes measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder. (Section 32 a. and b.)

Whether or how this aspiration will be turned into action remains to be seen, as does whether this potentially expansive conception of public policing, which is contracting elsewhere in the UK, is conducive to making the necessary savings to the public purse while retaining an effective police service. In any case it should be noted that the ‘centralization’ implied by amalgamation is, in principle, balanced against the legislation’s explicit attempt to connect local policing arrangements more directly with local government structures (through the appointment of 32 local area commanders, one for each of Scotland’s local authorities). In itself this might provide some reason to be optimistic about the future of local partnerships, but even before the new organization opens its doors there is uncertainty about how these local arrangements will, in fact, be implemented and what ‘teeth’, if any, local structures will have in holding the organization to account.

Northern Ireland

The state of community safety in Northern Ireland as a distinct policy field may further be used to evidence the socio-spatial variation in the community safety landscape in terms of the relatively recent developments compared with the other UK regions. Unlike the long-standing regimes in place across the UK, community safety has been part of the local policing and security lexicon only since 2000 (Criminal Justice Review, 2000). Furthermore, although a legislative basis for community safety partnerships has been in existence since 2002 under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act, it has fallen some way short of the ‘national mandatory’ model that took root after the CDA in England and Wales in 1998. Out of the creation of CSPs following the Criminal Justice Review of 2000, it is, however, important to note several key features of this ‘new’ model of community safety and functioning set within the context of Northern Ireland.
First, the legislative provision for the CSPs under the 2002 Act (as drafted) lacked much of the strength of its CDA counterpart for England and Wales. Indeed, there was never any Section 17 equivalence which demanded that local authorities and service providers incorporate crime and disorder reduction into their everyday, core activities. Neither was there any Section 115 obligation upon public authorities, mandating the sharing of information between partner agencies. And, in general, the legislative provisions relating to CSPs in the country under the 2002 Act were never brought into force – creating a de facto voluntary basis for their operation. Even the newly created Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, designed to unite previously disparate policing and community safety regimes, have retained these flaws, embedding an outdated, limited model of community safety within a new political dispensation (Topping and Byrne, 2012). Essentially, then, and in spite of the legislative ‘streamlining’ under the Justice Act (NI) 2011, Northern Ireland still retains an institutional infrastructure that remains patchy and uncertain, perhaps more akin to the earlier ‘voluntary’ phase in England and Wales.

However, beyond such institutional developments, it is impossible to understand Northern Irish developments outside of the exceptional politics of the region since the 1998 peace process, the scaling down of paramilitary violence and efforts at the ‘normalization’ of policing. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) continues to remain the default answer for all things ‘crime’ and ‘safety’, reflecting the lack of an embedded policing plurality or community safety culture in either national or local government thinking (Topping and Byrne, 2012). Indeed, such police-institutional centrisim is also reflected in the pivotal role PSNI retains within the new community safety framework in the country. This in turn relates to the deeply contested symbolism of the police and security in the country.

There is also a range of quite specific dynamics that have an impact on the participation of key actors (state and non-state) in the delivery of community safety programmes in the unique landscape of a society in transition such as Northern Ireland. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the ‘normalization’ of community safety and local policing is associated with the fragility surrounding the relationships between many communities and the PSNI – along with the lives and experiences of those living in ‘interface communities’. In addition, community safety problems may be said to occur in ‘duplicate’, whereby the same social issues are addressed in parallel across the sectarian divide, draining both PSNI and governmental community safety resources. Normatively, future community safety agendas should be tailored to meet the specific needs of such communities and recognize the contributions of community-based peace and conflict resolution programmes outside of traditional police-centric approaches to crime and disorder reduction and security. Yet the ‘normalization’ of Northern Ireland presents challenges for many of the non-state or community-based security governance contributions given that they developed out of a lack of cooperation with the state during the conflict. Furthermore, given the context of economic austerity, the days of ‘blank cheque policing’ are over and the distribution of monies and resources to what are essentially two separate communities can no longer be sustained. Finally, ‘normal’ social problems (for example, poverty, social exclusion, marginal groups) have remained hidden under the veil of the conflict but may require more serious attention – as occurs in other parts of the
UK and Ireland – rather than being sidelined as ‘security’ is prioritized. However, in the context of the ‘localized’ phase of community safety development in England and Wales, the organization and participation of civil society in community safety activities in Northern Ireland are a strength from which other countries in the region might take note (Topping and Byrne, 2012).

Republic of Ireland

Of the five jurisdictions under consideration here, the ROI has least experience of community safety as a distinct institutional infrastructure and mode of local social control. The patchwork pattern of localized community safety and weak institutional infrastructure is not unlike that of Northern Ireland. Although constantly cited as one of the most globalized societies in the world and for its highly flexible, ‘glocalized’ networked policy, the ROI has only partly adopted neo-liberal policies in crime control (Kilcommins et al., 2004). On the one hand, the state is highly centralized, with little devolution to local authorities, but, on the other hand, its political culture is rooted very much in the clientalist nature of clientelist politics. Relying upon a knowledge base that is arguably little more than administrative commonsense, a network of key criminal justice actors has historically guarded the field in the local governance of crime for several generations, evident in the 1993 report of the Interdepartmental Report on Urban Crime and Disorder (Bowden, 2006). Although this may have buffered policy-making from the importation of neo-liberal policies, it has maintained the governing and symbolic power of the key traditional decision makers in the justice institutions and in the national police (An Garda Síochána). Accordingly, advancements in crime prevention and community safety have been slow to emerge and have been for the most part driven by the actions of key actors locally and regionally.

Again, like Northern Ireland, there is no equivalent of the CDA and community safety has been only a recent addition to the governmental lexicon (see Government of Ireland, 2009). Legislative reforms in policing have, however, created the possibility for dialogue between police and local authorities in the Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) established under the Garda Act 2005. Although JPCs give off appearance of democratizing the governance of security, Mulcahy (2012) points out that they remain firmly under central control. Bottom-up and middle-out innovations in the National Drug Strategy, through a network of district-level Local Drug Task Forces, have resulted in community policing initiatives that include community participation. Social crime prevention programmes with young people that had previously been monopolized by the police force under its community relations policy have now shifted to the Youth Justice Service, established in 2005. However, few if any developments have been conceptualized as ‘community safety’ per se, rather appearing in the guises of police accountability, drug prevention and youth justice. Community safety-style initiatives have also sprung from programmes of urban regeneration, specifically in the city of Limerick and at Ballymun in Dublin. Thus the shape, form and depth of community safety are highly dependent upon regional or sectoral institutional ensembles within a variety of policy spheres and funding lines. Community safety following the regeneration route draws primarily from funding lines in the housing policy field; and community policing draws from justice and law reform.
A key challenge structuring community safety politics in the ROI, moreover, is the hegemony of the ‘gangland’ discourse relating to distinctly marginalized urban areas, which, it might be argued, obviates social inclusion and community safety discourses in favour of securitization and surveillance. Any normative agenda on who should be involved in the delivery of urban security in the Irish context lies in defining the field and constructing a community safety practice in a discourse of democracy, citizenship and participation. However, third sector capacity to articulate itself in this emerging field remains underdeveloped and muted compared with Northern Ireland.

The uneven institutionalization of community safety

On the basis of the foregoing discussion it is possible to contrast the stereotyped anglophone model of community safety with a much more nuanced understanding of the uneven institutionalization of community safety across the UK and the ROI. Mapping this comparative unevenness, however, also helps to unpick some of the core dimensions and tendencies of community safety, as follows.

Localism

Community safety is locally bounded. The problems it seeks to address are local in manifestation, if not necessarily in causality. Yet the powers and resources that are deployed by governing actors may be acquired from governmental interests from beyond the locality, which tend therefore also to be stakeholders in the enterprise. In England, the New Labour government between 1997 and 2010 sought to give community safety a steer, governing at-a-distance through a dirigiste approach underpinned by managerialist technologies such as targets and performance indicators. The governing presumption was of a translation of national priorities into local problems, although in practice this often manifested itself as a contestation between priorities imposed ‘from above’ and problems experienced and identified ‘from below’ by local agencies, politicians and communities involved in consultative and participative mechanisms. The arrival of the PCC may alter but not fundamentally transform this dynamic, as central government effectively hands over its steering to the body of the PCC, whose own construction of the local, shaped at the police force level, may grate with alternative constructions of the local generated in the towns and cities that constitute police force areas. Wales serves as a point of contrast insofar as there has been a similar at-a-distance steer, but focused less on priority problems and more on a priority ethos of social inclusion. The local, however, is not purely the construction of governmental interests. In Northern Ireland, for example, community safety has acquired a transitional status, to a large extent locally owned and governed by actors outside of the state. Elsewhere, the ‘safety’ of the local has been shaped by ‘governance from below’, while, in the ‘voluntary’ phase of community safety in England, non-state actors such as NACRO (the crime reduction charity) played a prominent part in constructing the local at the level of the housing estate. The point here is that the localism to community safety is still a negotiated process that falls hostage to the many transitional dynamics that underpin and animate the polity.
Networked or partnership-based

Community safety largely owes its origins to the limitations of previous approaches to the management of crime and related problems, mainly based on criminal justice. It identifies its subjects as ‘wicked issues’ that need to be addressed by coordinated partnership-based services that span different public services but also different sectors, embracing public, private, voluntary and community sectors. In the constitutional-legal settlements made in England, Wales and Scotland, these partnerships have tended to become more formalized, institutionalized in a governmental architecture that typically includes strategic-level bodies or forums constituted by managerial levels of bureau-professional expertise, and operational equivalents where practitioners variously scan and monitor the environment, delivering services and responding to emergent problems and concerns. Yet, in the ROI and in Northern Ireland arrangements are more flexible and less institutionalized, because the legislation has been understood as more permissive than mandatory and because the discourse of community safety has taken root with non-state as well as state actors.

Whether institutionalized or not, there remain key points of contestation within the partnership-based orientation of community safety. One such point may be found within partnership dynamics and power relations, where there is a particular dialectic between police-led and local-authority-led constructions of community safety. Although this may be played out to some extent in the long-standing contestation between ‘situational’ and ‘social’ crime prevention, it is also more complex and multi-layered than this, from different subjects of intervention (for example, the ‘crime-focused’ concerns of policing to the ‘well-being’ concerns of local governments) through to different technologies of prevention (for example, the science of crime risk analysis versus narratives of criminal aetiology). Central government steering of community safety in England and, to a lesser extent, in Wales, replete with its emphasis on evidence-based practice, practitioner ‘toolboxes’ and problem-oriented methodologies such as SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment), has tended to facilitate a police-led construction even in that agency’s absence, perhaps illustrating a manifestation of Lukes’s (1974) third face of power. Scotland’s commitment to Community Planning, meanwhile, situates policing more squarely within local governmental narratives of well-being; whereas in the Northern Irish context, where partnership is less institutionalized, things may be more contested as ongoing police-led concerns over securitization vie with non-state actors’ demands for social justice.

Multi-purpose or multiple-goaled

Community safety is frequently represented as having a strong preventive orientation, and this is an important part of its claim to legitimacy. However, the conceptual elasticity of both prevention and community safety has generated a strong dynamic of ‘mission creep’ that makes it very difficult to contain them within any particular policy boundaries or domains of expertise. Whereas some stakeholders have argued in favour of a ‘pan-hazard’ approach that would link crime with other threats to social well-being such as environmental pollution and discrimination, we would suggest that community safety encapsulates the following broad goals (Edwards and Hughes, 2012):


3. Restorative justice: reintegration of offenders and conflict resolution through diversionary activities, reparation and mediation.

4. Social justice: seeking social and political inclusion through improved education, training, employment, housing, health, leisure and family support; improving health and safety at work; targeting corporate and environmental crimes, and facilitating citizen engagement with government.

Moving towards a comparative understanding of public security

Having briefly reviewed developments in community safety across the UK and the ROI, we have been able both to challenge the notion of a coherent single anglophone model and to distinguish some of the core dimensions of community safety across this comparative context. We do not think these are much different in those European states that have also demonstrated a preventive turn, where there is also a contested localism, a partnership orientation and multiple goals.

Now, on one level, differences in policy are explicable in terms of the different social, political, economic and cultural contexts in which constitutional-legal settlements are forged and community safety is ‘translated’. There is a danger here of over-emphasizing the variation and neglecting the commonalities. In our view, these commonalities arise from the status of community safety as policy activity, which according to Colebatch (2002) involves the exercise of two resources, namely authority and expertise, in the pursuit of order. In the case of community safety, that order is the somewhat nebulous, multiple-goaled end-state of ‘safety’ or ‘security’. Both of these resources are contested, and it is the differential settlement of this contestation in different geopolitical contexts that produces the manifest variations in policy that we observe.

In Weberian terms, authority is primarily the rational-legal authority of state actors, whether judicial, legislative or executive; although authority can also be expressed through traditional sources, such as the patriarchal ‘governance from below’ documented by Stenson and Lea (2007) or the moral authority of faith communities. Authority is enacted, we would contend, primarily in what Brunsson (2002) demarcates as the political sphere, where the currency is mainly that of policy ‘talk’. Here the contestation occurs through governmental bodies, whether central, devolved or local. In terms of our core dimensions, we see it manifested in the struggle over localism (statutory guidance for the Crime and Disorder Act in England and Wales infamously declared that it embodied the principle of local solutions for local problems, and much of the next decade was spent contesting this principle). We also see the contestation expressed in terms of (multiple) goals, as different policy actors push their diverse agendas, such as the Welsh government’s espousal of a social justice alternative to England’s crime reduction...
agenda, or the contested status of community safety as an alternative or adjunct to criminal justice.

Although the distinction between authority and expertise may not be as clear-cut as Colebatch (2002) suggests, because for example in Foucauldian terms expertise generates its own authority as a power–knowledge discourse, expertise resides more in Brunsson’s action sphere, where the currency is more likely to be that of policy ‘action’. There is contestation here too: within partnerships and networks, for example, there are inter-professional rivalries that can mirror those that emanate from the ideologies that animate contestation in the political sphere, seen most stereotypically in the division of ‘care versus control’. Similarly, insofar as science animates expertise, it too may be contested. Take, for example, the contestation between the ‘hard science’ of crime analysis, which has become so prominent in the UK thanks in part to the influence exerted by ‘crime scientists’ over UK Home Office administrators, and the ‘soft science’ of a more criminologically informed understanding of aetiology with which many community safety practitioners operate as a part of their professional habitus.

Brunsson’s (2002) distinction between policy talk, decisions and action serves to remind us that there are different levels at which we can recognize policy activity. Inevitably, with a relative paucity of empirical research upon which to draw, characterizations of the institutionalization of community safety tend to focus more on the political sphere, and thus more upon policy ‘talk’. Such ‘talk’ varies because it has to fit and legitimate policy within the different contexts in which it is generated. But there may be a gap between policy talk and action, which Brunsson characterizes in his terms as a form of ‘organizational hypocrisy’, in which what is said and done, or how activity is represented and how it is enacted, may be quite different.

We would argue that it is in this gap that there exists space for community safety practitioners to operate in socially progressive ways and for analysts of community safety to engage with normative questions about preferred directions of travel. This is particularly important in the present climate of austerity in which the usefulness of community safety is in question, particularly in the face of European-wide tendencies towards a punitive turn. The heterogeneity of community safety that we have exposed here arguably makes it timely for the purposes of community safety to be re-examined. At the level of action, community safety opens up broader policy agendas, enrols a broader range of relevant actors (both formal and informal), cultivates potentially better ‘schemes of cooperation’ among these actors, and addresses the failures of criminal justice policies in reducing multifaceted social harms. There is, then, the potential for community safety to be a key vehicle for the realization of a social justice policy agenda, which necessarily appeals to a wider purpose, displacing the categories of crime and risk with the problems of social inequality, integration and regulation, cultivating in turn shared purposes around notions of safer cities, quality of life and economic regeneration.

Notes
1 ‘Urban security’ in fact has very little purchase in the UK and the ROI, where ‘community safety’ remains the preferred term. Our discussions in the text of this paper refer to ‘community safety’ policy in order to retain empirical authenticity, but we use ‘urban security’ in our title in recognition of its utility in facilitating comparative debate across Europe.
The preference for ‘community safety’ in the anglophone world, to signify a ‘preventive turn’ in policy responses to crime, is indicative of the purchase that communitarian thinking has had on the broader spectrum of public policy in these countries and particularly on issues of ‘law and order’.

It is beyond the remit of this paper to address the significant variation in community safety policy at the local level and intra-nationally (between cities, towns and ruralities); see, however, Edwards and Hughes (2005), Hughes (2007).

There has always been contestation over the politically nuanced naming of the community safety enterprise. The centrally imposed nomenclature for what was previously labelled a crime and disorder reduction partnership was wholly resisted by the Welsh Assembly, which preferred the CSP label, and many localities in England also preferred to brand themselves as CSPs rather than CDRPs.

One telling example of this civil service power base is the failure by the neo-liberal party of the Progressive Democrats to introduce the equivalent of the British Anti-Social Behaviour Order in the Criminal Justice Act 2006, which has been effectively ignored by the middle-level officials with the power to administer it.

Schemes of cooperation are defined as stratagems through which governing capacity is actually realized and through which it can be lost (Edwards and Hughes, 2012).

References


