

THE ECOSYSTEM FOR ORGANIZED CRIME

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THE ECOSYSTEM FOR ORGANIZED CRIME

The intellectual study of organized crime suffers from at least four major distractions: (a) mixing overall analysis with the requirements of prosecution, (b) understating the diversity of criminal cooperation, (c) underestimating how crime cooperation interacts with legitimate activities, and (d) overestimating the degree of planning and sophistication needed for offender symbiosis to occur. This paper draws from the life sciences to analyze criminal cooperation in full diversity, yet with greater clarity. In the process, the author produces *twelve principles* to help understand “the web of criminal cooperation.” The author distinguishes public, semipublic, semiprivate, and private aspects of criminal cooperation, and emphasizes the dependence of organized crime on the failure to manage public space.

The advent of the European Union has brought with it new opportunities for organized crime. It has energized not only police but also scholars, who have produced many new studies and ideas.¹ These scholars have extended earlier American work,² giving the field of organized crime research a new life.

THE PROBLEM

The televised version of organized crime depicts highly organized people in business suits sitting around a table

for meetings, with intricate coordination across a vast field, and a certain brilliance of mind. Scholars have long told us that the televised version of organized crime is substantially wrong – that most organized crime is much smaller in scale and coordination.³ Even when its chain of events reaches widely, seldom is it centrally coordinated in a careful way. In some cases local coordination can be strong, but the wider the span of crime the lower the probability that coordination is highly centralized. In short, the public image of organized crime fits relatively badly in nature, perhaps with a few exceptions.

New European scholarship more than verifies this general point. Drug sales, cigarette tax evasions, corruption, and other crimes are not highly centralized or coordinated in vast terms. This is quite consistent with earlier American work on different types of illicit gambling, racketeering and criminal cooperation – some of which can be coordinated to an extent, but not consistently so.

European police experts and scholars have further diversified the examples of criminal cooperation and organization.⁴ Further, organized crime research around the world is increasingly carried out and available in the English language. Combined with American research, we are at a unique moment in the history of research on criminal cooperation and organization. We know more than ever. We know the televised model seldom applies. We know that organized criminal actions are diverse and often loose. But we have no image of organized crime to replace the discredited image. The problem is to find a suitable image, explain it, and offer some ideas about how to use it.

¹ European work at HEUNI includes Jon Spencer, Kauko Aromaa, Mika Junninen, Anna Markina, Jüri Saar and Terhi Viljanen, 2006, “Organized crime, corruption and the movement of people across borders in the enlarged EU: A case study of Estonia, Finland, and the UK.” Heuni Papers Series No 24. Helsinki: HEUNI. In addition, see Petrus C. van Duyne, Matjaz Jaeger, Klaus von Lampe and James Newell, Editors, *Threats and Phantoms of Organized Crime, Corruption and Terrorism*. 2004. Nijmegen, the Netherlands: Wolf Legal Publishers.

² See especially the work of Peter Reuter, including but not limited to *Disorganized Crime: The Economics of the Visible Hand*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

³ See the references above, as well as Rick Brown and Ronald V. Clarke, *Police Intelligence and Theft of Vehicles for Export: Recent U.K. Experience*. *Crime Prevention Studies*, Vol. 17, 2004, pp. 173-192 (Michael G. Maxfield and Ronald V. Clarke, Editors, Devon, UK: Willan.) Also see Mangai Natarajan and Ronald V. Clarke. *Understanding and Controlling Organised Crime: The Feasibility of a Situational Approach*. Paper presented at ECCA, Wellington, New Zealand, July 2004. Finally, take note of Derek B. Cornish and Ronald V. Clarke, “Analyzing Organized Crimes,” Chapter 3 in Alex R. Piquero and Stephen G. Tibbetts, Editors, *Rational Choice and Criminal Behavior: Recent Research and Future Challenges*, New York and London: Routledge, 2002.

⁴ I use the term “criminal cooperation and organization” because of my allergic reaction to the term “organized crime.” The latter conveys a specific image popularized by television, one not substantiated by scholarship and experience. However, this paper does not include all criminal cooperation, much of which is too rudimentary to fit under the rubric of “organized crime,” rightly understood.

This is not the same as finding “the bad guys” and sending them to prison. Rather, this is an *intellectual* problem. We need to organize our *minds* to understand how offenders cooperate. This understanding would go beyond any one group of offenders or any one crime. It would consider how such cooperation diversifies. It would look at processes too local for national attention. It must be flexible enough to deal with new criminal cooperation that emerges and offenders who change what they are doing. In short, I am seeking something very general, but still helpful.

THE NETWORK APPROACH HAS LIMITS

It has been useful for *heuristic* purposes to view organized crime as a social network. That is, offenders know one another and exchange illicit favors, goods, or services in some fashion in some sort of human chain. The network approach should not be dismissed, and has offered a good stopgap way to study criminal cooperation and organization. But the network approach has not solved the problem. It does not tell us which way influence flows as a general rule – even if it might assist a particular study. Network analysts have offered important empirical work, and some genuine findings. But that’s not a *theory* of criminal cooperation and organization. We shall continue learning from the network analysts, but we must push ahead towards an intellectual image of criminal cooperation.

THE DRAMATIC FALLACY⁵

Often the most dramatic crime problems and groups draw the greatest attention from the public, press, and police concerned with organized crime. Such attention is an intellectual distraction. This does not deny that *particular* groups of offenders create an extra problem for society, requiring action. If drug smuggling is of

major public concern, the most organized drug smugglers may draw the attention of police and prosecution. But the drug smuggling problem involves a vast array of small fish. The intellectual study of organized crime requires understanding what’s less dramatic and of less public concern as well. In other words, the study of criminal cooperation and organization must pay great attention to ordinary processes not covered in the news.

EVENTS, SEQUENCES, AND SETTINGS

My initial point is that organized crime scholarship pays too much attention to specific *groups of people*. Progress in understanding organized crime requires shifting focus towards

specific and tangible *events*,
their specific *sequences*, and
their specific settings.

In other words, the criminal acts themselves and the linkages among them provide the basis for organizing our knowledge and understanding of organized crime.⁶ The particular people can shift and weave, but the structure is provided by the events.

Of course, scholars have long noticed events; but noticing them is not enough. Events, sequences, and settings must become the *organizing principle* for other information. Like a basketball game or football match - with substitutions - the teams and individuals change, but the field and rules provide the basic structure. Indeed, criminal individuals and groups are usually less structured than sports.

A police executive in a large European city employed surveillance data to discover the “organizing figure” for local drug sales.⁷ A week later, the “leader” was out on the street selling small packages. Whoever received a shipment of drugs was the “big fish” for a week or two, and then became a “little fish” again.

⁵ Borrowed from M. Felson, *Crime and Everyday Life*, Third Edition, 2003. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁶ Note prior references to work by Clarke and collaborators, as well as Mary McIntosh. *The Organisation of Crime*. (London: Macmillan. 1975).

⁷ Personal communication.

Even the network changed by week. The big fish this week shared the business with *his* friends, but they were out of luck the following week.

Thus we learn to follow the specific events, sequences, and settings. These provide the structure within which social groups and networks work. Of course, more stable racketeering can be found in some places, but it's an empirical question whether that occurs or not. Look first to the tangible events and settings. Assume minimal and unstable organization of people, unless definite evidence shows otherwise. Even after you discover a stable criminal organization somewhere, don't assume that will be true in the future.

OFFENDER CONVERGENCE SETTINGS

The Brantinghams discovered that crimes cluster around a local McDonald's restaurant, and around a local tough bar.⁸ Their work has helped many scholars understand that crime must be analyzed geographically, and that certain geographic settings are very important for understanding it. Moreover, removing or limiting such settings has a major impact on crime both on location and in its environs.

Offenders are likely to converge in certain settings, which then become central for crime. Good hangouts enable illicit cooperation. More generally, an *offender convergence setting* helps set the stage for criminal acts.⁹ Offenders can go there shortly before committing a crime, to find accomplices or to gain information leading directly to additional crime. For example, offenders can share information about an impending drug shipment, or divide that shipment up.¹⁰

Offender convergence settings are places that set the stage for crime by assembling accomplices and getting an illicit process started. Illicit transactions might occur in these settings, or might occur later. In either

case, such settings are important for understanding crime cooperation, and how to interfere with it. Offender convergence settings will vary by age. Youths often meet in informal but persistent settings, such as street corners, a hall in school, or other hangouts, including bars, fast-food restaurants, video parlors, parks, and street corners. In Japan, marginal youths often hang out in pachinko parlors (where legal gambling occurs). Older offenders might also meet in marginal bars, street corners, parks, or drug hangouts. In the early 20th century, pool halls in the United States were offender hangouts; cities tried to exclude teenagers from them.

Some offender convergence settings involve complete criminal transactions, including exchange of contraband. However, offender convergence settings might also set the stage for further criminal actions elsewhere. We need to distinguish arranged meetings from those that are not arranged in advance. Arranged meetings might occur in McDonald's or other public places allowing brief exchange of information or illicit goods. However, many informal settings provide ongoing social life among offenders, who then might cook up crimes as they go along. In addition, established racketeers might have offices, social clubs, or favored restaurants or bars that they completely dominate to the exclusion of others.

Although some offender convergence settings might involve exactly the same people, we should not assume that to be the case. Some tough bars or other public settings provide a shifting group of persons, sometimes strangers, sometimes vaguely familiar, sometimes friends. *These settings allow criminal cooperation to persist even when the particular persons vary.* Thus offender convergence settings help us understand the structure of criminal cooperation, even when participation is unstable.

Professor Pierre Tremblay discusses "the search for suitable co-offenders." His work does not focus on the very young offenders, but rather on those old

⁸ P. L. Brantingham and P. J. Brantingham, "Mobility, Notoriety, and Crime: A Study of Crime Patterns in Urban Nodal Points," *Journal of Environmental Systems* 11 (1982), 89–99.

⁹ I have developed these ideas at length in "The Process of Co-offending," in M. J. Smith and D. B. Cornish, *Theory for Practice in Situational Crime Prevention* (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press, 2003). (Volume 16 in Crime Prevention Studies series)

¹⁰ Illicit-trade settings permit buyers and sellers of illicit goods and services to transact business. That usually refers to the end users of drugs or other illegal commodities purchasing from end-sellers. This paper avoids this distinction, which I have developed elsewhere. See Marcus Felson, *Crime and Nature*, 2006. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

enough to be picky about their partners in crime. That requires that potential accomplices meet in settings where they can explore and discuss. Totally public places might not be suitable if they expose offenders to interference from police, parents, or others. But some public access provides an offender with more contacts with possible accomplices. We arrive at a view of the underworld that does not deny or minimize the role of social networks and groupings, yet depends on recurrent settings where criminal cooperation can grow.

In some of these settings, co-offenders find one another rather easily. An offender convergence setting provides crime structure and continuity - *despite instabilities among individuals, groups, or networks*. Even if specific participants change, the criminogenic setting can persist. A frequent motivation for entering such settings is to socialize, with criminogenic information transmitted only in passing. Thus offenders converge in the bar just to talk, but also cook up some deals. But some offenders enter convergence settings, such as a tough bar, with crime in mind. I suspect that many places where offenders linger combine these functions. In any case, removing offender convergence settings can help deplete the process of crime cooperation without necessarily requiring more arrests.

Of course, a total denial of freedom of assembly can reduce crime, too. Such a denial is antithetical to a free society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not include these provisions:

- The right to get as drunk as possible among a group that's just as drunk.
- The right to trade stolen goods in public places.

- The right to take over a public park and kick everybody else out.
- The right for businesses to grow by facilitating crime.
- The right to sell heroin to new teenage customers in public places.

As you shall see, society can protect public places while minimizing arrests. Indeed, focusing on *settings* is far less dangerous to freedom than focusing on human suspects.

THE DEGREE OF CONCEALMENT

Crime generally requires a degree of concealment. This process is largely physical. Concealment depends upon the location of a setting where transactions occur, as well as features of the transactions themselves. Concealment varies directly with the privacy of a setting. That privacy can be accomplished in urban settings when public access is prevented. But privacy can also be accomplished in remote places where illicit plants are grown or contraband is manufactured.

Concealment varies inversely with the size and quantity of contraband, as well as with the transaction time required. A few small pills are easily hidden, and quickly exchanged. The ideal concealment occurs in a very private setting with a small amount of contraband and a quick transaction. The worst risk to the offender occurs in public settings with large amounts transacted slowly. This equation sums up the point:

$\text{Required Concealment} \propto \frac{\text{Privacy of setting}}{\text{Size and quantity of contraband, Transaction time required}}$

In other words, required concealment is directly proportional to the privacy of the setting and inversely proportional to the size and quantity of contraband, as well as the transaction time required by the crime.

In general, a bulky and slow transaction requires more privacy, while a smaller-scale transaction might occur safely with minimal privacy. We can immediately see that illegal processes must differ in the privacy they require for safe completion, since illicit transactions vary in size, quantity, and span of time. These technical variations among crime forms will normally impel participants towards different privacy requirements. Such privacy requirements are important for understanding each type of crime cooperation.

REACHING THE PUBLIC

Some crime transactions depend on reaching the public. That places offenders in a bind – on the one hand they need to conceal their actions, but on the other hand they wish to find customers. Professor John Eck of the University of Cincinnati offers us important insights on drug transaction places. He starts his classic article as follows:

Pity the plight of the retail drug dealer. He has valuable drugs that he wants to sell. He also may have some cash from previous sales. He wants to make more sales. But if he approaches a possible customer he may be approaching a cop, a person working for cops, or somebody who is ready to take his drugs and cash by force. Our dealer must protect himself while contacting customers and making sales.

Consider the plight of the active retail drug buyer. She has cash and maybe other valuables. If she approaches the possible seller to make a buy, she may find that she is dealing with a cop, or somebody who

wants to take her money but provide no drugs. Our customer must protect herself while contacting sellers and making purchases.¹¹

Professor Eck notes that drug dealers and buyers make their trades using either social networks (based on prior acquaintance) or routine activities. If they use social networks, they are not dependent on special settings, and are more secure. But the use of networks restricts the number of customers a seller can find easily, and limits the buyer to just a few sellers.

That's why drug trades often rely on settings where routine activities bring more opportunities for drug exchanges. That makes it possible for strangers to exchange illicit drugs. The best drug sales areas are those where both buyer and seller already conduct legitimate routine activities. Drug markets using the routine activity solution have three geographic characteristics:

- Sellers try to stay at specific places, or to move very short distances.
- Illicit markets are located on arterial routes or near where lots of legitimate activities occur.
- Place managers - those controlling settings for legitimate purposes - are either absent or corrupted.

This kind of drug market can be large and serve many people. For example, outdoor drug markets tend to spread many more illicit drugs to a wider clientele. Some of the best drug vendors locate in small apartment buildings with no apartment manager and no locked gates, but easy access. Sometimes drugs are openly sold through windows, from or to cars, or via "runners" who transfer the product and money, or using "touts" who draw customers into or toward the sales settings. The point is that open drug sales widen the market for the seller, and enable recruitment of new drug abusers.

¹¹ John E. Eck, "A General Model of the Geography of Illicit Retail Marketplaces." In Eck and D. Weisburd, Editors, *Crime Prevention Studies: Crime and Place*. (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press; and Devon, UK: Willan Press, 1995). (volume 4 in Crime Prevention Studies series)

This very openness is very useful for offenders when police are absent or inactive, and when neighbors are indifferent or afraid. Yet when society mobilizes itself, such drug-sale settings are *highly vulnerable* to police action, environmental design, and civil abatement - the use of civil and administrative law to influence property owners to remove illegal activities.

Rana Sampson contributed an important pamphlet on preventing drug dealing from privately owned apartments.¹² She combined what she learned at Harvard Law School, and as an undercover narcotics officer, with a review of academic literature and police experience. Officials can be surprisingly effective in reducing these drug-trade settings. Alex Harocopos and Mike Hough have shown how similar principles can help interfere with open-air drug markets.¹³ It is increasingly evident that removing these settings can undermine illicit sales quickly, with lasting impact.¹⁴

The drug seller finds himself in a bind. He must give up a certain amount of concealment in order to gain business. That exposes him to counteraction. This vulnerability is the key to a counterintuitive policy recommendation. The most common prescription for controlling organized crime is to cut off the head – to find and arrest the most important offenders. I would argue that it makes more sense to *cut off the feet*, that is, to remove or impair the settings where cooperative crime meets the public or where small-time criminals meet one another. The point is that organized crime is most vulnerable in its most public settings. Moreover, those settings are most subject to situational interference with minimal arrests. Before explaining this, I take up the issue of Internet usage.

INTERNET AND ILLICIT TRANSACTIONS

Clearly the Internet has been used for illicit transactions. The Internet sets up buyers of illegal commodities for fraud, attacks, and other dangers. It also makes it possible for buyers and sellers to exchange perverse goods and services as promised. It has also been used for police stings and police surveillance, but a whole range of situational prevention measures have been adopted while avoiding arrests. Over time many public authorities and private sector computer managers have learned to defeat certain Internet abuses by monitoring systems electronically and thwarting illicit communications. Universities have learned to improve security simply by shutting off students who abuse their system, or even threatening to do so. One need not arrest people. Unfortunately, many police monitor Internet abuse mainly with arrest in mind, hence making themselves highly inefficient. How much more cost-effective it would be to send e-mail messages, signed by the police, asking the offender to cease? How much easier it would be to disrupt illicit websites than to arrest people who click in? As experience accrues, authorities are learning better to defeat forms of Internet abuse in a cost-effective way, using situational prevention.¹⁵ The use of the Internet to organize criminal activities will in any case depend on the specific activity, and the responses will vary accordingly in method and success. We should not assume in advance that the Internet makes all criminal cooperation uncontainable. Surprisingly, computer transactions are more public than most people realize, paradoxically increasing *both* offender opportunities and their vulnerabilities. I suggest that the Internet only transforms crime if allowed to do so. Even then, it cannot transform all stages of crime,

¹² Rana Sampson, "Drug Dealing in Privately Owned Apartment Complexes" (n.d.). Available from the Center for Problem Oriented Policing, <http://www.popcenter.org> (accessed September 3, 2005).

¹³ A. Harocopos and M. Hough, "Drug Dealing in Open-Air Markets" (2005). Available from the Center for Problem Oriented Policing, <http://www.popcenter.org> (accessed September 3, 2005). See also Rana Sampson, "Advancing Problem-oriented Policing: Lessons from Dealing with Drug Markets," in Johannes Knutsson, (ed.), *Problem-oriented Policing: From Innovation to Mainstream* (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press; and Devon, UK: Willan Press, 2003). (volume 15 in Crime Prevention Studies series)

¹⁴ Some illicit trades involve two settings. Sellers of contraband might solicit on the street, then take the customer to an abandoned spot. On the way both are vulnerable to police action, as well as environmental design to interfere with their criminal process. There's good reason for offenders to prefer a suitable setting for crime's aftermath and to minimize the time and distance traveled when vulnerable.

¹⁵ See Graeme R. Newman and Ronald V. Clarke, *Superhighway Robbery: Preventing E-commerce Crime*. 2003. Portland, OR: Willan. Matthew Williams, *Policing and Cybersociety: The Maturation of Regulation within an Online Community*. *Policing & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 4, September 2006. Sheridan Morris, *The Future of Netcrime Now*. (Parts 1 and 2). Home Office Online Report 62/04 & 63/04, December, 2004. Available from <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/internet01.htm> (accessed October 19, 2006).

or protect offenders from authorities and, most of all, from one another.

It is easy to be seduced by discussion of new technologies used in crime, forgetting that so much of the illicit process is old fashioned and physical. Even new forms of crime have physical requirements, such as public access to anonymous computers and business irresponsibility in enforcing system rules. Indeed,

- Many illegal transactions depend on sales of commodities to some kind of public, including new customers who need a visible location to check out sellers prior to the transaction.
- Police seek to arrest one offender in order to find another. That gives offenders an incentive to hide their home location from their accomplices in case they wish to escape notice.
- Most offenders are more afraid of one another than they are of police. One offender might prefer to meet another in a public or semipublic place to avoid attack. Tipping off your home location is risky.
- Computer frauds often take advantage of illicit customers. They have no recourse, at all.

We need to distinguish those illicit computer contacts that allow computer delivery from the ones that depend on a physical delivery process. In the latter cases, crime must surface in the physical world. In the former case, crime must surface in the public areas of the Internet. Surfacing is the issue.

FOUR LEVELS OF EXPOSURE

Crime must surface because so many of its processes require that to happen. Nonetheless offenders might like to locate crime where they can be safe. For periods of time, they might do just that. But their world changes. Accomplices in crime often become unavailable, due to illness, injury, arrest, migration, volatile crime interests, drunkenness, or a developing reputation as unreliable. That's why offenders must replenish their supply of potential accomplices and/or customers. New liaisons normally depend on public or semi-public convergence settings. Even those who know one another and commit crimes in private locations might introduce new people to a private setting, broadening the sphere of criminal contact. A very interesting question is when and whether totally private settings are safer for offenders than other settings.

It is very common for experts in organized crime to distinguish the Underworld from the Upperworld. The latter term carries some ambiguity. On the one hand, the Upperworld implies legality as well as visibility. Yet illegal activities use the visible world as well.

Thus we cannot escape the notion that offenders must gain *physical access* to one place or another. That brings up an important question: How locations are supervised – however informally. Following the late Oscar Newman, a *public setting* has so much access that it effectively belongs to nobody and is essentially unsupervised.¹⁶ Even a privately *owned* setting can be largely unsupervised, hence highly public in *access*, and quite suitable for crime. It can be a good place for total strangers to make an illicit transaction without much risk of interference. It can allow very casual acquaintances to find one another for dubious purposes. It can also help people arrange illicit encounters in private settings nearby.

A totally *private setting* is controlled by a very few people away from public view. Even if it is publicly owned (such as social or public housing), it can still be privatized in access. Crimes can occur there, of course, but strangers and casual acquaintances will not find one another that easily.

¹⁶ Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space*. New York: Macmillan, 1972. See also Oscar Newman and T. Kingsley, (1995). *Defensible Space: Deterring Crime and Building Community*. Washington DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development. One needs not agree with all aspects of Newman's work to accept the basic point about supervision of space.

We also need to consider *semipublic* and *semiprivate* settings. These are very important for crime to occur. The following scale helps us understand how cooperative crime surfaces, and where it is most exposed to interference:

1. Public Settings – Minimal supervision, easy contact with strangers
2. Semipublic Settings – Transition and transfer settings seen by many, but not all
3. Semiprivate Settings – Transition and transfer settings seen by a few
4. Private Settings – Limited access

As noted earlier, this scale refers to supervision, not ownership. Thus a public or social housing complex contains “private” apartments. A privately-owned mall has public access. When Oscar Newman presented these four categories, he was thinking mostly about street crime. He argued that public settings made such crime much easier, while private and semiprivate settings usually reduced crime by giving citizens more control of their own space. Applying these ideas, planners have closed off social housing to protect its residents.

The same principles apply in an interesting way to organized crime. Organized offenses often require people and commodities to flow across all four types of setting. Thus farmers in another country grow hemp openly, relying on their remoteness from anybody who might interfere. The product is processed in semipublic settings, then shipped through private conveyances, or concealed somehow in public. The actual sales of contraband occur in various places. Some is sold in the public park. Some is sold in semipublic spots that are largely abandoned. Some is sold in semiprivate spots and some in entirely private locations. The use of these settings depends on market niche, size of package, and risks one needs to take.

Society is most upset about illicit actions in private settings. Yet a substantial part of organized criminal

activity crosses all four types of setting. Indeed, much of organized crime depends substantially on sales in public and semipublic places. *These are available to crime largely because society has abrogated its authority to regulate large public portions of major metropolitan areas. Thus the most serious contributor to organized crime is the public sector of society, as it neglects highly visible parts of its own environment.*

Indeed, society can reduce organized crime of several types by reducing public sales of contraband, by no longer abandoning public space to selfish abuse. It is very easy for public officials and the public itself to dismiss its crime problem by blaming deep and hidden forces, rather than looking to its own neglect of its local metropolitan environment.

Interestingly, the Internet also has public, semipublic, semiprivate, and private aspects. Often its illicit uses occur because the public and semipublic portions of the Internet are unsupervised. The businesses involved have little incentive to protect the public against crime, and so they leave it alone. As with physical space, when nobody owns the problem, nobody owns the solution. However, many solutions have been devised and applied, and are most effective when oriented towards situational prevention.¹⁷

By using situational crime prevention and problem-oriented policing, by redesigning public parks, by paying closer attention to apartment construction designs, organized criminal actors would lose a good share of their illicit opportunity. This often reminds people of “broken windows policing,” but there’s more to it. Sometimes it is indeed important to control minor offenses in order to prevent major ones.¹⁸ But the means and linkages need to be specified. “Broken windows” can be too vague, opening itself to misinterpretation. But an enlightened view of the approach recognizes that

- Not all minor offenses lead to major offenses;

¹⁷ Part 2 of the Morris document, just cited, is specifically devoted to situational prevention of netcrime.

¹⁸ George W. Kelling and Catherine Coles, *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996, Touchstone, 1998. The authors are less oriented towards arrests than they are portrayed by critics. Situational prevention especially seeks to avoid arrests by designing places and management systems.

- Minor arrests can often be reduced without multiplying arrests;¹⁹
- Zero-tolerance does not really exist, since police must use discretion and since criminal justice processes are very expensive; and
- Situational crime prevention is a repertoire of *many* techniques, most of which *reduce* the pressure upon police and the degree of punitive action.

Unfortunately, news headlines feature the more emotional and extreme claims about crime prevention, such as zero tolerance, heavy punishment, social prevention, social justice, and arresting kingpins. Managing safe public parks is far less glamorous, and requires ongoing effort with minimal confrontation. Such effort is our best chance at crime prevention, since the Underworld depends on the Upperworld. We need to specify how; then we can begin to do something about it.

REMOVING CRIME OPPORTUNITY

A major empirical and practical crime prevention effort is underway in the United States, Britain, and certain other nations. But let's not exaggerate. These innovations are not shared by most officials or by the public, for whom discussion of crime prevention and control remains on a much less creative level. Nonetheless, the hope for a better future is conveyed well by at least two websites:

www.popcenter.org
www.crimereduction.gov.uk/

These sources include numerous ideas for reducing offender convergence and transaction settings. Experience is accruing to prove that situational crime prevention and problem oriented policing has great success with a vast array of crimes. The increasing research demonstrates many successes in controlling

crime-oriented bars and pubs, as well as drug dealing in private apartments, and drug-dealing in open-air markets. Even reductions in property crimes are relevant: Such ordinary offenses help many people purchase contraband, in turn feeding organized crime in a broader sense. The pamphlets mentioned give increased attention to the interplay among criminal activities. The bad news is that the growth of one type of crime very often feeds several other types. The good news is that curtailing one type of crime very often reduces several other types.

Moreover, researchers are discovering that the old "crime displacement" hypothesis is largely wrong. That hypothesis stated that preventing crime here will merely push it there. I will not go into the several types of displacement now, but we now find strong indication that crime prevented is largely crime depleted. In fact, prevention often leads to a diffusion of benefits – crime reduced here contributes to reductions in nearby times and places.

Those who do not really *read* about situational crime prevention still have opinions about it:

- "Situational prevention only applies to property crime." In fact, many forms of violence have been directly and indirectly reduced using situational measures. Changes in barrooms are a good example, as mentioned above.
- "Situational prevention only reduces crime slowly." In fact, *specific slices* of crime can be reduced overnight, or even wiped out, through situational measures. The widespread use of steering wheel locks is an example. However, one must keep slicing to have a broader impact.
- "Situational prevention does not apply to organized crime." The invention of double-entry bookkeeping reduced cooperative crime long ago. Instituting proper auditing systems quickly removes the chance for

¹⁹ In the worst areas, more arrests might be needed at first to regain turf that is entirely controlled by offenders, but in most cases fewer arrests are the norm.

crime against and by means of ordinary organizations.

· “The development of the Internet makes situational prevention obsolete.” As mentioned earlier, situational measures have sliced away at problems. Viruses and various forms of Internet fraud have been reduced, and more can be accomplished in the future if people try to do so.

· “Situational prevention only helps the rich.” In fact, situational prevention has some of its greatest successes in protecting low-income housing and theft of old cars owned by poor people.

· “Situational prevention interferes with human rights.” In fact, most situational prevention measures are unobtrusive. The few exceptions are not necessary for most crime prevention.²⁰

· “Situational prevention has not been substantiated by evidence, since often studies do not have large numbers of cases and clean experimentation.” In fact, situational prevention is supported by a *preponderance* of evidence over *many* studies, not by perfection in any *one* study. In crime research, most claims of a clean experiment are bogus, anyway.

As we learn more about preventing *obvious* crime, we have a much better chance to thwart *hidden* criminal cooperation that depends on it.

THE WEB OF CRIME COOPERATION

The interplay of many crimes produces a web of interdependence.

Small time thefts lead to fencing stolen goods,
Providing thieves money,
For purchasing small amounts of illegal drugs,
Contributing to small-time drug dealing,
Feeding into large-scale drug dealing.

This web of crime cooperation exposes each crime to a larger environment, without which it cannot thrive. (I have explained elsewhere the multitude of interdependencies between illegal and legal activities.²¹)

These ideas lead me towards an unusual set of recommendations for understanding organized crime in society, as well as reducing it:

1. Focus on the *acts*, not the group engaging in it.
2. Divide cooperative and organized crimes into *very* specific types.
3. Study the *vast variation* in criminal cooperation and organization.
4. Assume *minimal* levels of cooperative complexity, that such crime is seldom ingenious.
5. Don't follow the money; follow the *physical transactions*.
6. Don't look for deep secrets; look for the *obvious* and *almost obvious*.
7. Find out how one crime *depends* on another.
8. Find out how crime *feeds off* legitimate and marginal activities.
9. Tease out the *sequence* of events for ongoing criminal cooperation.
10. *Interfere with that sequence*, access to the customer, or modus operandi.

²⁰ See Marcus Felson and Ronald V. Clarke, “The Ethics of Situational Crime Prevention.” Pages 197-218 in G. Newman, R.V. Clarke and S. Shoham, (eds.), *Rational Choice and Situational Crime Prevention*. Aldershot: Dartmouth Press, 1997. Also see an entire book on this topic edited by Andrew von Hirsch, David Garland, A. Wakefield, *Ethical and Social Perspectives on Situational Crime Prevention*. Portland, Oregon: Wakefield. 2000.

²¹ See Marcus Felson, “Crime and Nature”. 2006. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

11. Forget the bosses; monitor and thwart the opportunity for *small-time* crime, and
12. Use situational prevention to reduce crime opportunities that feed organized crime, directly and indirectly.

It's quite a bit of work to figure out the interdependencies among many types of crime, and between criminal and legal activities. The efforts to do so increasingly pay off in finding out how to control organized criminal efforts. For example, Canadian authorities realized that marihuana growing operations depend on very large amounts of electricity, thus giving up their locations as well as providing a policy handle to close them down. Similar thinking is reflected in recent European literature on organized crime control, and so it should be.

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2. International Co-operation. The Development of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Central and Eastern Europe by Dr. Matti Joutsen. 1994 (out of print)

3. The Interchangeable Roles of Victim and Victimizer. Second Inkeri Anttila Honour Lecture, Department of Criminal Law and Judicial Procedure, Faculty of Law, University of Helsinki, September 9, 1993. by Ezzat A. Fattah.

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4. Developments in the Prison Systems of Central and Eastern Europe. By Roy Walmsley. 1995 (out of print)

5. Crime, Justice and Human Rights in the Baltics by Maeve McMahon. 1995 (out of print)

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