

## Coalitions against crime; the Dutch experience

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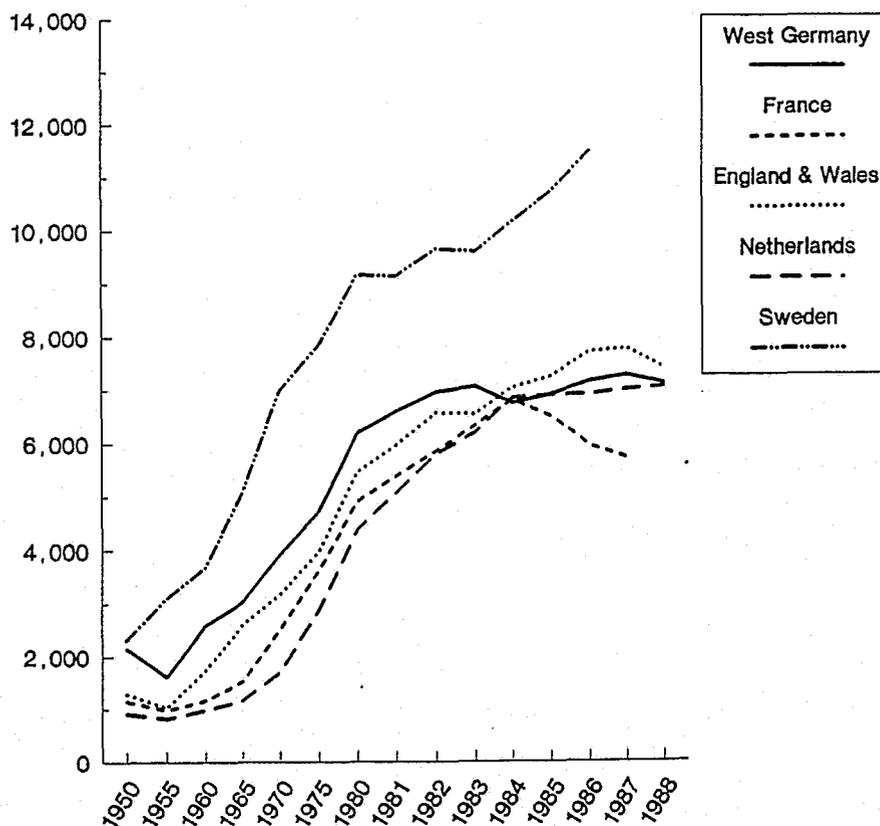
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## Coalitions against crime; the Dutch experience

### 1. Introduction

The number of crimes registered by the police has gone up sharply since the seventies in most European countries, as can be seen in figure 1.

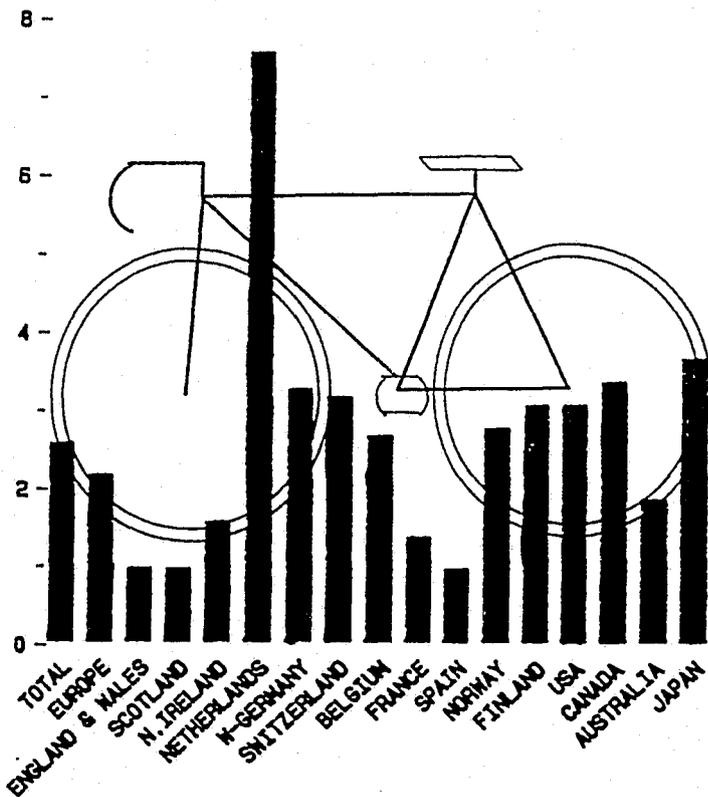
Figure 1: Crimes known to the police



For some time so-called critical criminologists kept saying that the upsurge of the registered crime rate did not reflect a real increase in crime. The increases of the police figures were thought to be an artefact caused by intensified policing and a greater willingness of the public to report crimes to the police. In the Netherlands, however, the Ministry of Justice has since the mid seventies regularly carried out surveys among the public about victimizations by crime. The results of these surveys indicated a real growth of the numbers of crimes committed. In the mid eighties a multi-party consensus emerged in Parliament that petty crime had become a real plague and that innovative action was to be taken.

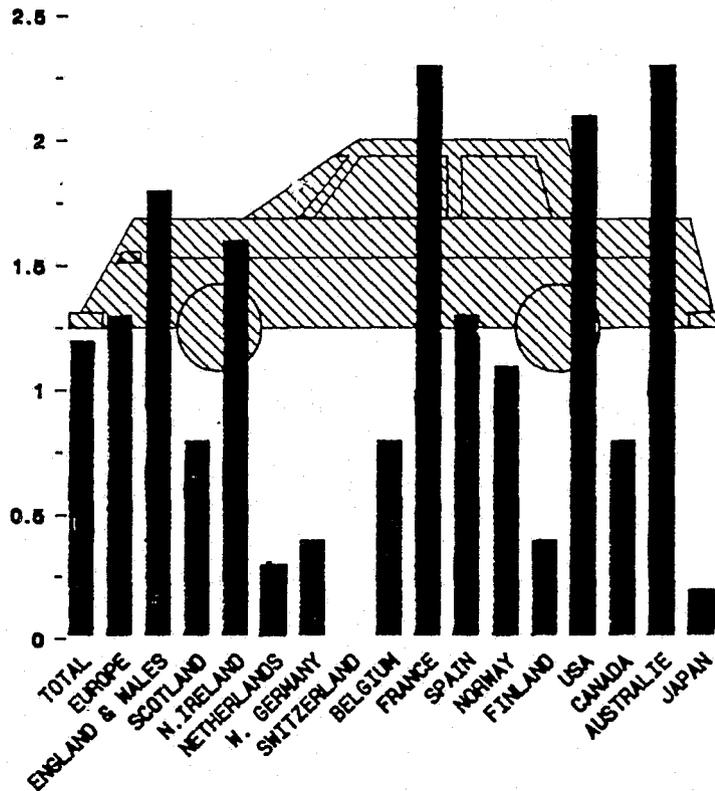
In 1989 an international victimization was carried out in fifteen countries (Van Dijk, Mayhew, Killias, 1990). The findings of this comparative study confirm the idea that the Dutch citizens are no longer as law abiding and conventional as they once used to be. One type of crime in particular has become rampant in Dutch cities as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Victimization rates bicycle theft



The average Dutch family owns at least two or three bicycles. Unfortunately a large part of the younger population, including my students at the University of Leyden, have taken aboard the mistaken notion that bicycles are communally owned. In Australia bicycle theft is still as rare as it is in the United Kingdom. There is a positive side to the Dutch focus on bicycles. Since all teenagers in the Netherlands are experienced cyclists, they seem to be less tempted to steal cars, although these are as widely available as elsewhere. Figure 3 shows that Australia is second to none in its prevalence rate of car theft.

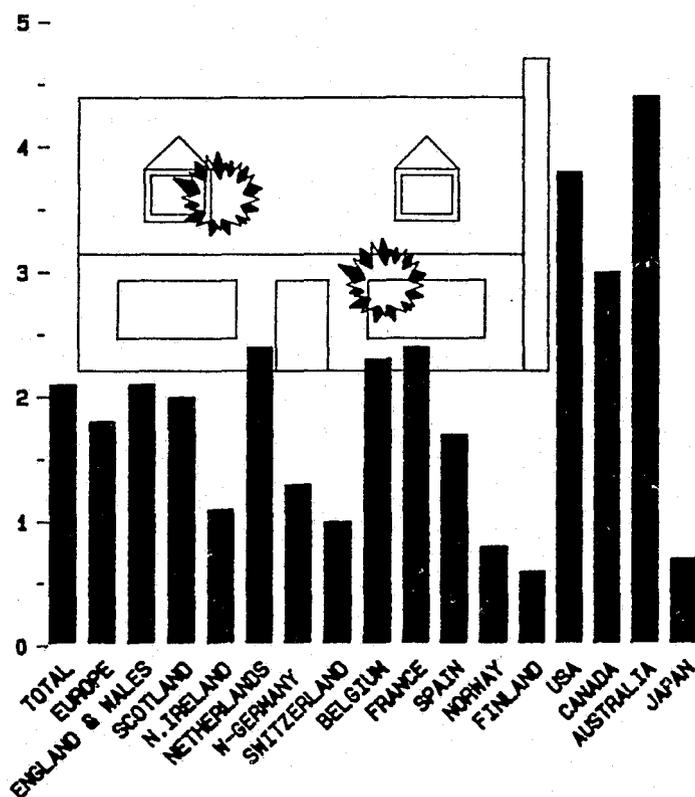
Figure 3: Victimization rates car theft



The best advice I can give for the prevention of car theft in Australia - tongue in cheek - is the importation of large quantities of Dutch bicycles. It seems preferable to have a high rate of bicycle theft than a high rate of car theft. Cycling is also healthier and much less damaging to the environment.

In most countries the type of crime which puts the heaviest burden on ordinary households is burglary. Figure 4 shows that here both the Netherlands and Australia are facing serious problems.

Figure 4: Victimization rates burglary



Amongst the European countries the Netherlands stand out with a high burglary rate. Of all participating countries Australia has the highest burglary rate.

The relatively high crime rates of Australia are partly explained by the high proportion of citizens living in a big city. If a comparison is made between the crime rates of urban areas only, the Australian rates are only marginally higher than European rates and lower than American and Canadian rates. Our analyses have also taught us that local burglary rates are positively related to the proportion of households living in detached houses (Van Dijk, 1991). Detached houses appear to be more vulnerable to burglaries than apartment buildings. The proportion of households living in detached houses is higher in Australia than anywhere else. According to the theory about situational crime prevention, this feature probably lies at the root of the high Australian burglary rates.

There are no obvious explanations for the relatively high crime rates of the Netherlands. The country is highly urbanized but a substantial part of the population still lives in rural areas. Detached houses are not very common in the Dutch cities. According to the official doctrine of the government the rise of crime is largely to be seen as a negative side-effect of the international movement towards an individualistic lifestyle. Up to 1965 the majority of the Dutch families were active members of one of the main churches. Most schools and sports

and youth clubs were run by the churches. All this changed in the late sixties within a period of a few years. The churches as well as the labour movement lost their grip on the Dutch youngsters. This rapid transformation has probably undermined the traditional structures for socializing the young. In combination with a relatively high unemployment rate in the early eighties this sociological factor seems to have caused a rise in crime.

In response to the crime problem the Dutch government decided in 1985 to pursue a two track policy. On the one hand the criminal justice system was strengthened. Criminal investigation departments of the police were modernized and the capacity of the prison system was increased by fifty percent in order to detain drugs traffickers. On the other hand the Dutch government was firmly committed to the introduction of a fully fledged crime prevention policy. In this paper I will discuss the experience with these preventive policies in the past seven years. I will first discuss the organization of crime prevention policies in the Netherlands in the first years. Next I will present some case histories of successful and not so successful crime prevention projects at the local and national level. Finally I will dwell upon the prospects for crime prevention in the Netherlands in the coming years.

### **The organization of crime prevention**

In 1985 the Ministry of Justice put before the Second Chamber a comprehensive plan designed to combat crime in the period from 1985 to 1990. The plan announced a new policy with regard to social crime prevention which would go far beyond the advice given by the police about technical security measures. Following in the footsteps of an Advisory Committee, the plan proposes that other ministries, public authorities at a local level, businesses, private organizations and the individual citizens must take a considerable share in combatting the most commonly occurring crimes. The aims of the social crime prevention policy of the Minister of Justice and his essential partners in the public and private sectors can be summarized under three main headings:

1. improving the physical design of urban environments to ensure that surveillance of potential offenders is not too difficult and opportunities for crime are reduced;
2. reintroducing into "at risk" environments (e.g. shops, shopping centres, public transport) people who, as part of their work, are in a position to exercise "functional surveillance" (e.g. train and bus conductors, janitors, shop assistants, sport coaches and youth workers);
3. finding ways to strengthen bonds between the younger generation and society - particularly through the family, the school, leisure activities and employment.

In 1985, in order to facilitate execution of the prevention policy, the Interdepartmental Committee for Social Crime Prevention was set up under the chairmanship of the Director General (of the Directorate) for Police and Immigration of the Ministry of Justice. The task of the Committee was to coordinate and stimulate implementation of the policy of prevention which is to be carried out by the relevant Ministries.

In order to encourage public authorities at a local level to develop social crime prevention policies, the Government set up a fund of 25 million dollars from which subsidies could be paid, during the period 1986 to 1990, for promising local authority projects. The Committee's task was to advise the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs on the allocation of these subsidies. The criteria governing selection for subsidies was - and is - a continuing subject of discussion between the Committee and a special committee from the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. One of the criteria used was that the municipality in question must be willing to continue the project at its own expense if it should prove effective.

In principle, the objective was that every local crime prevention project should be carried out under the guidance of a member of the secretariat and scientifically evaluated (Junger-Tas, 1989). Approximately ten percent of the budget was reserved for evaluation. In order to give the policy additional support, the Ministry of Justice publishes a quarterly magazine on crime prevention initiatives, with a circulation of 18,000. This magazine, under the title SEC, is distributed to municipal bodies, schools, sports associations etc. The magazine awards an annual prize in the form of an extra subsidy granted to the best crime prevention initiative of the year (this so-called Roethof Award has become an important annual media event).

#### *At local level*

In a municipality, primary responsibility for social crime prevention rests with the burgomaster. Many of the larger municipalities have set up crime prevention committees comprising the appropriate civil servants and aldermen, e.g. those with responsibility for youth and town planning, representatives from the police such as crime prevention officers and the public prosecutor.

### **A survey of the projects**

More than a hundred local authorities have applied to the Interdepartmental Committee for funding for local crime prevention programmes. The Committee has selected about 200 different projects for support.

Eighty projects are specifically directed towards the prevention of vandalism, a common element being special courses for schoolchildren. A standardized teaching package has been provided by the State for this purpose. Evaluation studies have observed positive changes in

both attitudes and (self reported) behaviour as well as in repair costs. In some cities training courses are part of a wider package of measures to deal with vandalism. In several cities special programmes have been launched for the prevention of thefts of bicycles, including the provision of bicycle sheds manned by formerly unemployed persons. It was found that in the short term Dutch cyclists are unwilling to pay more than a symbolic price for such services. In other cities prevention of shoplifting has been assisted by joint action on the part of retail stores, the police and the prosecutor's office. The take up rate of training courses for owners of small shops was generally rather low. Those who took part in the courses reported lower rates of victimization.

The Committee has also decided to fund several crime prevention oriented urban renewal programmes. In most cases these initiatives combine improved design with strengthening informal social control. Elsewhere, neighbourhood watch projects are sponsored as separate ventures. A preliminary evaluation study in three cities showed that crime levels were indeed reduced after the introduction of neighbourhood watch programmes.

In three other cities the Committee supports comprehensive programmes aimed at preventing truancy and dropping-out from secondary schools. Some new street-corner work projects which provide educational and work facilities are also being sponsored. Many of these projects also assist in the implementation of community service orders.

At last can be mentioned the financial support for documentation. A central computerized databank within the Directorate of Crime Prevention collects national and international literature, now totalling to more than 8,000 entries. This centre functions also as the collection and distribution point for the International Crime Prevention Information Network (ICPIN). This body of information is growing steadily and made available to interested parties across the world.

Other ministries have taken their share of the cost of prevention projects. For example, the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture has launched some 25 local projects aimed at the social integration of high-risk groups. These involve the use of integrated street-corner work with an emphasis on work and education facilities. Six additional projects are geared to youngsters belonging to ethnic minorities. Also 6 million ECU is spent every year on special work projects for permanently unemployed youngsters. The government has set itself the objective of providing training facilities or jobs for all persons between the ages of 16 and 21 in the coming years.

## Five cases of Dutch prevention

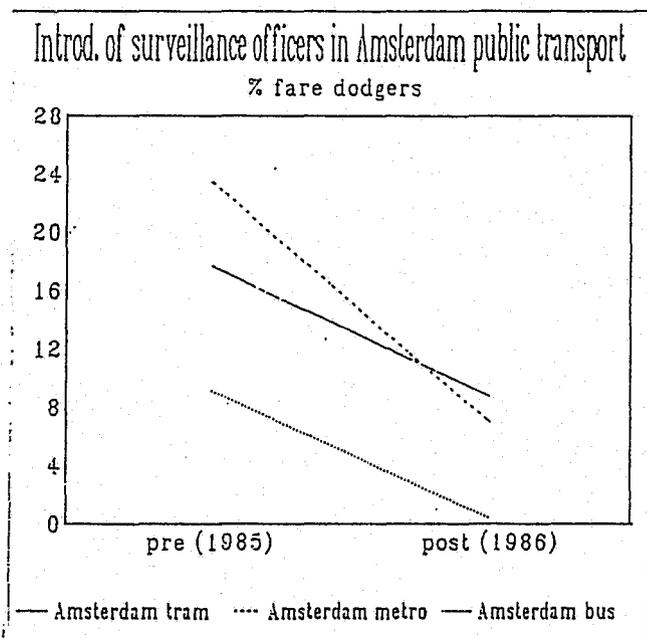
In order to give a more concrete impression of what is done in practice, some of the successful projects will be described. They concern public transport, schools, diversion, public housing and retail stores.

### Surveillance officers in Public Transport

The Dutch public transport system experienced since the seventies a steep rise in the number of travellers who do not pay their fares. Also vandalism and aggressive behaviour has increased sharply. To curb these phenomena, a new kind of officers was introduced on tramways and the underground system: the VIC's. VIC is the acronym from the Dutch for Security, Information and Surveillance. In the buses the entry system was modified so that everybody had to pass the busdriver and present a ticket. The system was introduced in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.

It is clear from the evaluation study that the percentage of fare dodgers (passengers without a valid ticket), fell in all three cities after the introduction of the 1,300 VIC's and the change in boarding procedure. The case of Amsterdam is illustrative for this effect (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Introduction of surveillance officers in Amsterdam public transport



Also the number of attacks and harassments on public transport decreased during the project. In addition, damage experts, passengers and staff unanimously agree that the introduction of VIC's have stopped the long-standing upward trend in the prevalence of vandalism.

Extra social benefits were drawn regarding the problem of unemployment. The VIC-project created approximately 1,200 new jobs. Many of the jobs were given to disadvantaged groups in the labour market as young people, women and ethnic minorities with a low level of education.

As an exception, in this project financial benefits and costs could be established fairly accurate. The extra revenues from ex-fare-dodgers are estimated at between 5 and 6 million ECU. The increased number of fines imposed by the VIC's generated about half a million ECU per year. Reduction of costs associated with vandalism is estimated at .7 million ECU. Savings on unemployment benefit amount to 9 million ECU per year, although this sum is not a direct profit for the public transport system. The total profit of about 16 million ECU is exceeded by the costs to deploy the VIC's: 21 million ECU. The difference can be seen as an investment in more intangible goals: the cutting of petty crime in general, a reduction of fear of crime, and the promotion of the use of public transport.

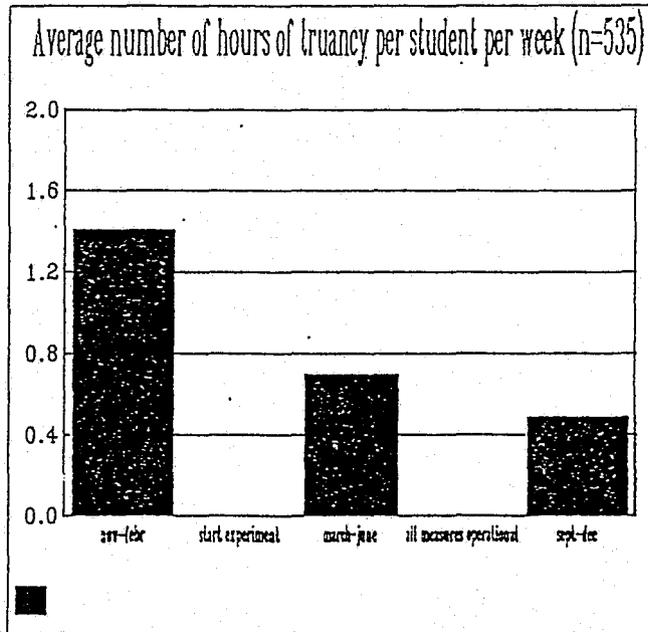
The Ministry of Transport has announced that in 1991 surveillance will be further strengthened by a drastic expansion of the number of ticket collectors.

#### **Schools: the Truancy Project**

Truancy is chosen as an approach to the crime prevention of youngsters for two reasons. First, truancy as such is a form of deviance deserving attention as such. Second, spotting truants gives an opportunity to reach predelinquents and early starting delinquents in a rather unobtrusive, non stigmatizing way. For it is a well-established research finding that school failure, truancy and school drop-out are strongly related to delinquent behaviour (e.g. Rutter, et al., 1979; Junger-Tas, et al., 1985).

In this particular project, three lower vocational schools were selected, as truancy and drop-out is relatively high in this type of schools. The first measure was the introduction in the school of a computerized truancy registration system. Using this system, parents were called the same morning or afternoon to report to them the absence of their child. This was supposed to work in a preventive way for incidental and non-serious truants, for whom the lack of control by the school or the parents was too inviting. The second measure was the appointment of an educational worker, who was responsible for the registration of truancy, disciplinary problems and imminent school drop-out. The educational worker discussed with the regular teachers youngsters at risk and advised and trained them in handling them. The third measure was referral by the educational worker to a special class, managed by a remedial teacher, qualified as an educationalist, and a teacher of technical skills. The special program offered in this class was at maximum three months, in order to make re-entrance in the regular curriculum as smoothly as possible. The effect on truancy is as follows.

Figure 6: Average number of hours of truancy per student per week (n=535)



After the introduction of the registration and warning scheme, a considerable reduction of truancy took place. Opportunity reduction by a simple increase in supervision and control appeared to be successful. About the success of the other measures, aiming at the reinforcement of the bond between school and problematic pupils, can be said more when the evaluation study is completed.

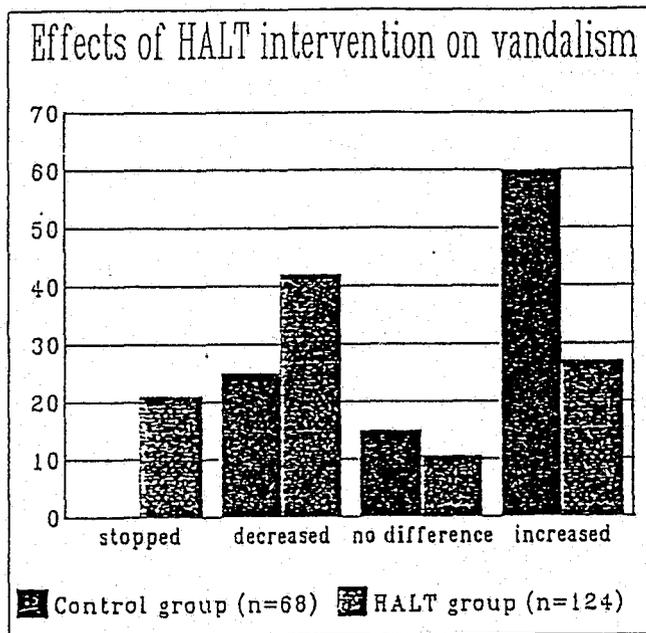
The Ministry of Education has issued recently new regulations on truancy registration. The Ministry also modified the regulations on truancy registration and replacing teaching staff on sick leave, in order to prevent delinquency during school hours. Secondary schools are being offered financial incentives to introduce measures to prevent vandalism.

#### **Diversion: the HALT-project**

HALT, an acronym of "the alternative", is meant as an alternative for prosecution of young offenders in cases of petty crimes, mainly vandalism. In the average case, a youngster caught for damaging or destroying property and referred by the police to the HALT-bureau, is made to clean up or repair the damaged object during his or her free time. Eventually, this task is combined with paying for damages. If the boy or girl does not accept the offer by the HALT-bureau or does not fulfil the obligations as agreed upon in a contract, the informal police report is changed into an official report which is then submitted to the prosecutor. The advantage of the HALT-procedure is that a quick and informal action can be taken and that

registration in the judicial documentation system is avoided. At the same time the necessary control function of the public prosecutor is maintained. An essential feature is that the intervention is community based, the juveniles are not excluded from society. From a psychological point of view an additional benefit can be mentioned: the kind of punishment is educative in itself. The responsibility of the youngster is emphasized, both by being held clearly accountable for the act and by working on the basis of an agreement. About 50 HALT-bureaus are now in operation, some as local other as regional institutions. To check if no unwanted net-widening would take place, an investigation was done about the kind of juveniles that ended up in the program. It appeared that the group involved did not consist of just ordinary but unlucky kids who happen to run into a policeman. Self-report data revealed them as far more delinquent than average Dutch youth, not only in turns of vandalism but also in relation to shoplifting, arson and burglary (Junger-Tas, 1989). Apparently a selection of youngsters for whom a clear reaction to their behaviour is appropriate. What are the effects of the HALT-intervention?

Figure 7: Effects of HALT intervention on vandalism



Compared to a controlgroup of youngsters having committed similar offenses in a city where no HALT-scheme was operating, the HALT-group showed, according to self-report measures, a significant greater decrease in offending after intervention. A positive change in behaviour took place in more than 60% of the HALT-cases, compared to only 25% after a traditional

handling by the police. Of the latter group, no one stopped offending. The effect is independent of age, schoolsituation, family situation and the use of alcohol and soft drugs. From interviews it appeared that the boys and girls were very well aware of the moral element in the intervention, the fact that they are held responsible and have to "make good" to the individual victims and the community.

The Ministry of Justice subsidises now diversion projects for young vandals of this type in about 60 municipalities on a permanent basis.

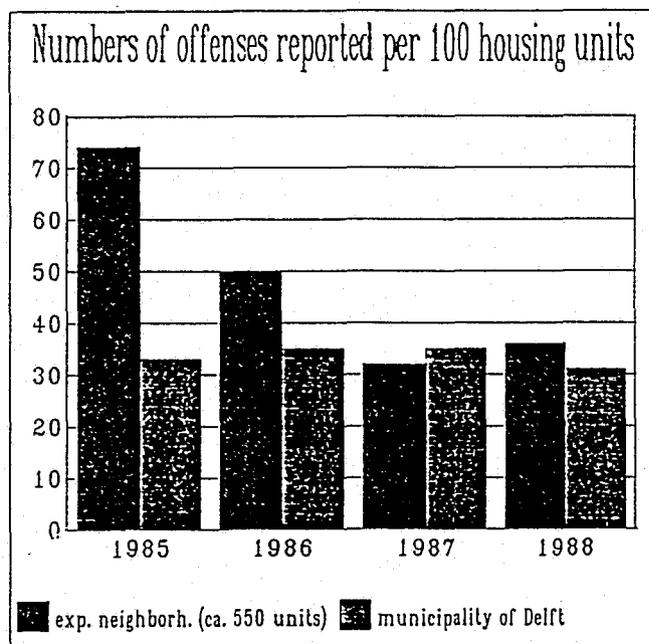
### **Public housing: a neighbourhood project**

Since the Shaw and Mackay research in the 40's on the spatial distribution of crime in American cities, deprived neighbourhoods characterized by social disorganization and high crime levels have drawn a lot of attention by researchers and practitioners alike. Recent studies like those of Bottoms and Wiles (1986) and Skogan (1986) point to direct parallels with the Dutch housing related crime problems. Some of the subsidized, low rent houses, often in high-rise buildings, are extremely problematic: decay, crime, poor technical quality and back rents are some of the problems for the managers and residents of these estates. The often applied "target hardening" and environmental design approach appears to have a limited effect. Therefore, new projects were started that in which social, supervisory and administrative measures were added. For the management of the project local and neighbourhood administrative structures were integrated. As an example, in Delft a project consisted of the following measures:

- new recreational facilities for youthful persons were arranged in cooperation with a streetcorner worker;
- seven caretakers were appointed to intensify supervision, to give information, advice and warnings and to keep the buildings clean;
- by redesigning parks and streets were made more surveyable and the buildings more vandalism-proof; entrances of the buildings were made less accessible;
- units were redesigned for one-and-two-person families, so to decrease the disproportionate number of youngsters in the neighbourhood; and last but not least:
- no plans were executed without consultation of the residents.

These measures were in total very successful: the appearance of the buildings is back to an very acceptable level; residents, municipal authorities and the estate management work together in a structural way; the caretakers are able to maintain order and cleanliness; all parties involved are happy with the result. The development of the level of crime is in accordance with this picture.

Figure 8: Numbers of offenses reported per 100 housing units



Nevertheless, some unexpected negative side-effects can be observed. The important one-and-two-person families did not integrate well in the existing population: most of them see their home as temporary and are not much interested in the neighbourhood. Their somewhat different lifestyles give rise to complaints of the original inhabitants. Although the caretakers are very well accepted, part of the residents is not able or willing to pay their financial part for this work. A last effect is the not increased tendency of the residents to keep the building clean: littering and pollution is seen as the responsibility of the caretaker and not of the residents themselves (Hesseling, 1990).

Still, as a prevention measure the project was highly successful. As a consequence, the Ministry of Justice is contributing during three years, in a decreasing percentage, to the cost of 150 caretakers introduced into high-rise flats owned by housing estates and experiencing serious social problems. These caretakers spend on average 30% of their time on cleaning, 25% on general surveillance, 20% on social exchanges with renters and 20% on repair work. According to an extensive evaluation study the employment of caretakers has been a success as a means to reduce vandalism, littering and drugs related disorderliness (Hesseling a.o., 1991). In many of the experimental flats burglaries in the houses, lockers or postboxes had declined too. The latter effects were more substantial in flats with a relatively high density of caretakers (1 caretaker for 100 to 150 dwellings). According to the surveys, nearly all renters

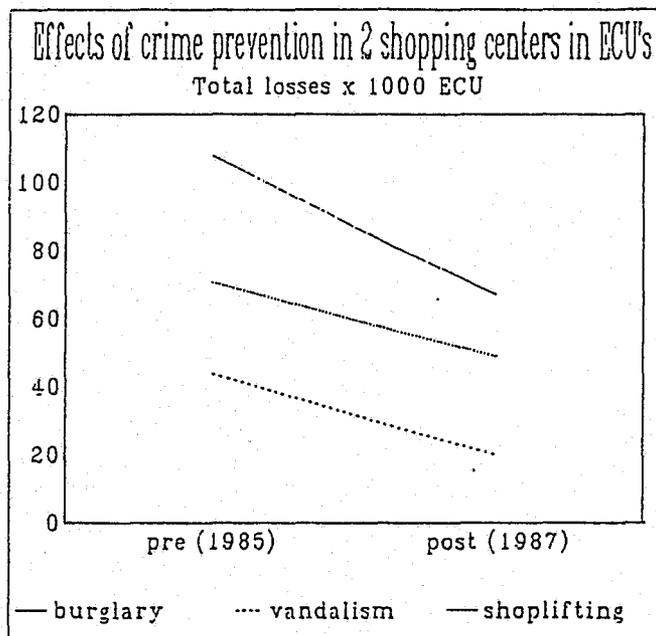
were in favour of a lasting employment of caretakers. In the majority of cases, part of the costs of caretakers are eventually born by the renters. In 60% the caretaker had already been offered a long term contract in 1990. Other house estates have also started to employ "social caretakers". The caretakers project is seen as one of the major achievements in the area of crime prevention.

#### Retail stores: an Utrecht shopping centre

In Utrecht a comprehensive crime prevention project was introduced consisting of among others the following measures:

- provision of instruction for personnel and managers of shops concerning shoplifting;
- installation of an electronic alarm system for retailers enabling them to warn each other and the security officer;
- appointment of two security officers for the dual purpose of being consulted by and giving assistance to public and retailers;
- "alternative" penalties for vandals and collective court sessions for shoplifters;
- a press and publicity campaign in support of the project.

Figure 9: Effects of crime prevention in 2 shopping centers in ECU's



As can be seen from this figure, the total cost of damage suffered by the retailers as a result of crime dropped considerably. Victim surveys among the shopping public indicated that crimes against the public had been reduced by 50% (Colder, 1988).

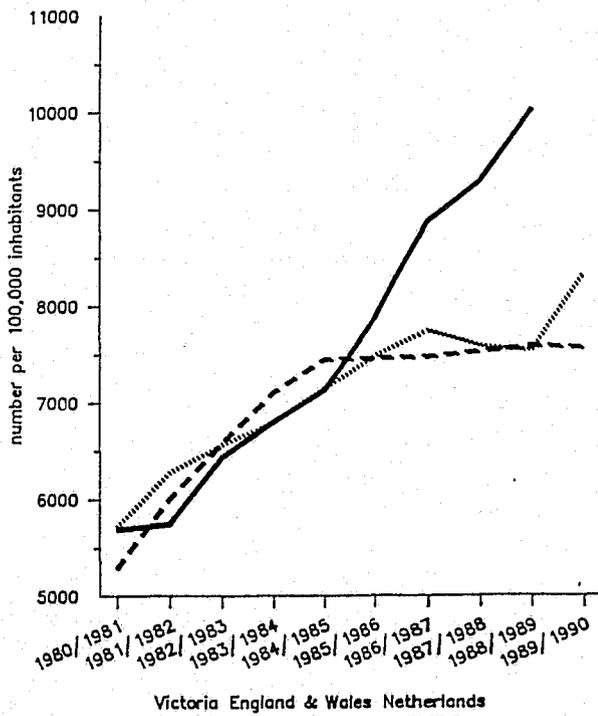
From an economic point of view the project seems to have been profitable for the retailers. The drop in damage they suffered was greater than the costs of the two security officers. When the government grant came to an end the retailers' association decided to continue the project at its own expense. Also for this kind of problems national measures are initiated. The Ministry of Economic Affairs has set up a national centre for information on the prevention of shoplifting. In anticipation of an alteration in the law on this matter, the Ministry of Justice has carried out experiments in five municipalities whereby the police may offer first offenders suspected of shoplifting the option of paying a spot fine and thereby avoid being brought to Court. Evaluation has shown that approximately 80% of the suspects take up the offer. In this way, shoplifting can be dealt with far more quickly and efficiently.

**Conclusions**

In the second half of the eighties crime prevention was institutionalized in all larger towns in the form of steering committees and crime prevention coordinators.

On a national scale, since 1984, the level of registered crime in the Netherlands has remained constant. In 1990 the registered crime rate went down for the first time since many years. Interestingly, the crime rate did not fall in other West-European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany, nor in Victoria (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Total offences per 100,000 inhabitants, Victoria, England & Wales and the Netherlands



Both from the victim surveys carried out and from self-report studies among young people, it shows that the real level of crime has fallen. There has been an accompanying rise in readiness to report crimes. One particularly favourable factor is the stabilization or even fall in the numbers of drug addicts (estimated at 15,000 throughout the country). In Netherlands municipalities there are almost no addicts under the age of 21.

From evaluation reports at present available it would appear that it is particularly those prevention projects in which official surveillance is intensified that are effective in the short term. This is true for surveillance in public transport, in shopping centres and housing estates. A winning combination seems to be to have clear rules and surveillance with a human face carried out by officers who not only maintain the order but also give assistance to the public (Colder, 1988).

Schools also provide an excellent field for crime prevention projects. Much can be done in primary education in the way of information about vandalism. In secondary education, keeping track of truancy and holding special classes for potential drop-outs can act as a brake on the slide towards a criminal lifestyle.

Less successful in the short term have been projects aimed at integrating or reintegrating young delinquents using recreative facilities, schooling and work. The ever-present danger in such projects is that extra facilities will be offered to groups of young people who are not only guilty of serious crime but also continue in such activity. Against this, positive results have been achieved in the context of community service orders for minors and persons under 25 years of age (Bol, 1985; Van der Laan, 1988).

### **The way forward**

In 1989 the Minister of Justice decided to set up a Directorate of Crime Prevention as a twin directorate next to the Directorate of the Police. This newly established directorate is responsible for the support and coordination of the police based crime prevention units of the various police forces. The directorate also continues the work of the previous interministerial committee for crime prevention by funding local crime prevention projects. Other responsibilities of the directorate are the planning and coordination of victim policies and the promotion of business security. In order to promote the collaboration with the business world in controlling crime a National Platform for Security and Criminal Justice was set up. This platform deals with interalia joint actions to address car theft, computer fraud and crime at industrial estates. It has an annual budget of 0.5 million US dollars at its disposal. The directorate also has a bureau for documentation and publicity which issues the journal SEC. The establishment of the Directorate for Crime Prevention testifies to the commitment of the Minister of Justice to the pursuance of prevention policies, as an integral part of his overall

crime policy. It should not, however, be seen as the manifestation of a centralistic, bottom down approach to crime prevention. In fact recent developments in the Netherlands clearly indicate a shift towards the municipalities as the key agents of crime prevention. At the local level crime prevention has outgrown its experimental phase too. Both the local governments and the chief commissioners of police tend to take crime prevention much more seriously than some years ago. They no longer look primarily to the central government for guidance and special funding of crime prevention projects but prefer to follow their own course. In the larger cities crime was made an item on the agenda of the so-called Social Renewal Policies aimed at the improvement of social conditions in socially vulnerable neighbourhoods. At the same time, the regional police forces begin to see crime prevention as a part of their problem-oriented mode of policing (Horn, 1991).

In 1990 the Minister of Justice issued a new five years policy plan, called the Law in Motion (1990). In 1991 the Ministries of Justice and of Interior presented a new crime prevention program to Parliament (Networking and Crime Prevention, September 1991). The new program sets out the following priorities for the coming years:

1. Improvement of security levels across the board. Plans for new buildings or industrial estates should be scrutinized concerning likely consequences for crime and security (crime risk assessments). Expansion of surveillance by caretakers, inspectors in public transport, bus conductors, caretakers in schools and city wardens. In many cities such functionaries are successfully recruited from the long term unemployed as part of special schemes. City wardens are functionaries in uniform without special authority, who patrol the inner cities of some twenty cities on behalf of the municipalities. They give information to tourists and exercise informal social control. In case of emergencies they immediately alert the police.
2. Standardization of security products and services within the framework of the European Community. This priority will be one of the tasks of the National Platform of Business Security and Criminal Justice.
3. Neighbourhood based crime prevention projects as part of the Social Renewal policies of the municipalities. For these policies special budgets of central government were decentralized.
4. Restructuring of police based crime prevention.

The philosophy expressed in the new plans sees crime prevention primarily as the outcome of local networking between the prosecutors, the police, agencies of local government, the business world and the voluntary sector. Prevention measures must be supported by targeted efforts of the police and special prosecution policies. For the implementation of the new

policies the central government has set aside an annual sum of about 60 million US dollars up to 1995 of which 10 million was decentralized to local authorities.

The new emphasis on the responsibility of local governments and police forces for their own crime prevention policies implies that the funding of the ministries of Justice and the Interior will probably be doubled by local agencies as part of policies of social renewal. The existence of a Directorate of Crime Prevention in the Ministry of Justice ensures that crime prevention as a vital part of the central government's overall crime policy will be preserved, regardless of municipal priorities in the future.

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