Violence between young people in night-time leisure zones.

Findings of a European comparative study

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the main findings of a comparative research project carried out by research groups in five European countries (Belgium, France, Portugal, Italy and Spain),[1] with the support of the European Union as part of the Daphne II programme.[2]

The goal of the project was to analyse violent situations in night-time leisure activities, especially those occurring between young people, together with the efficacy of social and institutional responses to these situations.

What follows is a description of the research methodology employed, the most significant results extracted from the reports of the five research groups and the main conclusions of the study.

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[1] The partners in the project were: the Police School of Catalonia (with the collaboration of the Commissioner of the Centre of Security Studies); the Research Group of Criminology & Sociology of Law at the University of Gent; the French Centre for Sociological Research into Law and Penal Institutions (CESDIP); the Security Policy and Local Police Promotion and Development Service in the Region of Emilia-Romagna, and the Criminology School in the Law Faculty at the University of Porto. In addition an evaluation was requested from Prof. Dr. Oriol Romaní, and an external reading by Prof. Dr. Philip Hadfield.

[2] The complete results of the study can be found in: Recasens, A. (Ed.) *Violence Between Young People in Night-time Leisure Zones. A European Comparative Study*. Brussels: Vubpress, 2007. Spanish version: Recasens, A. (Ed.) *La violencia entre jóvenes en espacios de ocio nocturno. Un estudio comparativo europeo*. Barcelona: Atelier, 2007 (also there is an edition in Catalan).

1. NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

1.1 Approach to the subject of the study

The relative newness of the subject of the study, especially in terms of analysis of the impact of public and private management models on the prevention of violence and the consequent lack of a solid theoretical structure, meant that it was not possible to formulate strong hypotheses. As a result, the research was designed based on postulates that were weak but also able to generate more solid hypotheses in the future.

Violence has not been tackled using a typology of acts of aggression. It is well-known that the concept of violence often refers to cultural and political dimensions and to subjective elements which hinder its definition. As a result, it was decided to characterise violence and its protagonists based on the perceptions and experiences of the actors on the ground without losing sight of the fact that these might refer to physical, verbal or symbolic acts of aggression.

Violence has been approached as a dynamic multi-stage process. A fight or act of aggression must be placed in the context of a series of interactions which give it meaning. Thus an aggression may arise from a prior series of poorly resolved conflicts (whether these are relational – between subjects or with the environment – or individual). The night-time leisure context has specific features which impact on such a process, meaning that analysis of it must be integrated into this context and the "partying itinerary".

In relation to the context, public and private leisure zone management models have been assessed in terms of their impact on conflict occurrence and management.

As for the itinerary, it needs to be borne in mind that as the night draws on the relative importance of factors which may favour an increase in conflict changes: the level of frustration among young people rises if their expectations have not been met, and there is an increase in their consumption of alcohol and other drugs, their degree of excitement, tiredness, etc. Thus work has been done based on an analytical difference between the various stages of the partying itinerary in order to identify the extent to which the elements that may contribute towards violence appear at each stage.

Attention has been specifically focussed on the moments prior to the act of aggression; these are not perhaps directly linked to its stages, but they do provide information about the conditions, whether of identity, signi-fication or of any other type, which explain it. Here special importance was attached to information about how young people direct and handle their partying activities. Violence thresholds have also been identified, that is to say the set of factors which explain the shift from a critical situation to an act of aggression or the inhibition of one. Aggression itself has also been studied, paying special attention to the attendant circumstances (time, place, seriousness) in which it takes place. The reaction of the various actors to conflict or aggression and the results of such a reaction, in other words its consequences for the aggressive process, have been analysed as well.

The main items subjected to transversal analysis in these stages are as follows:
– the time and place of conflicts;
– the possible spatial and environmental conditions which may contribute towards aggressive behaviour;

– relational factors (with the peer group, with other actors, etc.);
– identity, signification and motivation conditions;
– the consumption of alcohol and other drugs, and
– the formal and informal control factors that are present (or absent).

1.2 Analysis design

The techniques used by the five research groups have been highly qualitative.

A large number of examples of formal and informal leisure activities, in private or public spaces, etc. can be included in the category of night-time leisure. Nevertheless, limited time and resources prompted us to stress analysis of everyday night-time leisure activities,[3] especially at weekends and in venues open to the public or in public spaces.

The goal was to obtain a sample of reasonably comparable cases. Leisure venues were selected, depending on local conditions, to cover as far as possible a range of locations. These include both urban environments and leisure area clusters on the outskirts of towns and were designed to take in the full range of leisure activities, the different models for integration with their surroundings and partying itineraries or routes. Specifically, fourteen case studies have been looked at in the five countries.

As the space/time relationship seemed critical, it was decided to opt for synchronic comparison and a more or less simultaneous period was stipulated for all the groups to carry out their fieldwork (essentially the second half of 2006).

It was decided to limit the scope of the analysis using the framework of the subject set out above, but at the same time allowing

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[3] Seasonal or cyclical instances were tackled in greater depth in the Portuguese study.

the participating studies to have a degree of internal methodological freedom.[4]

As for the actors, it was agreed to study as a minimum young people of both sexes aged from 14 to 25 who frequent leisure areas; the police; public authorities with management responsibilities (governmental and security) in leisure environments; the owners, managers and personnel of leisure venues; and other actors who are present in these places (as risk prevention managers, local residents, etc.).

2. RESULTS

The growing media interest brought about by young people's consumption of alcohol and drugs and their involvement in accidents and violence has made a major contribution to increasing general social awareness of the problems under study here. However, the reverberations of specific cases have meant that this interest has simultaneously led to high levels of public alarm.

These public fears are especially directed towards certain groups of young people. As opposed to "normal" young people, other groups (the *gunas* in Porto, youths from the *banlieues* in the Paris region, the *punkabestias* and African immigrants in Bologna, and the *latinos* in the Barcelona metropolitan area) are associated most frequently by the actors interviewed with delinquency and violence in leisure areas.

Nevertheless, the association between leisure facilities and violence is not generally corroborated. There is a generalised coincidence

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[4] While sharing an essential qualitative framework, some of the research groups have laid greater emphasis on case studies, others on semi-structured interviews, some have looked at police statistics, others have not, etc. Such diversity is acceptable insofar as the research does not claim to measure or quantify. The goal is to describe the causal mechanisms for the main subject but without making the claim that the results can be mechanically transferred from one case to another.

when it comes to describing possible altercations such as disputes with local residents. In most cases these are a matter of noise levels, minor examples of anti-social behaviour, shouting and similar incidents.

Thus although there are incidents between young people in leisure locations, in most cases the young people are sufficiently willing and able to anticipate and avoid problems and self-regulate conflicts that do occur.

Young people who habitually go to night-time leisure facilities have a clear concept of the geography of leisure and have a map of violence, conflict, security and insecurity which they use to avoid specific places and groups. At the same time young people are grateful as a general rule for the presence of law enforcement officers as a factor conducive towards security and peacefulness, yet very few incidents are reported due to the aforementioned capacity for self-regulation and also to the fear of future revenge or lack of confidence in police intervention. As a result of the foregoing, and in spite of being the main victims (by a considerable margin) of the violence of other young people, they are not especially worried by the risks that they assume.

Violence of a particular degree of intensity between young people appears to spring from three sources:

a) Most is attributed, as mentioned above, to the presence of individuals from deprived social backgrounds or neighbourhoods. They are usually blamed for the acts of aggression and thefts and robberies that the users of leisure areas are the victims of, as well as for drug dealing and other illegal activities.

b) The second source is connected with factors seen by most young people as being "external". On most occasions, it is a question of people who have been excluded from the leisure activity but who stay in the area harbouring strong feelings of resentment and a sense of injustice with a propensity to cause disturbances. They are blamed for

provoking and inciting violence, quarrels and confrontations between young people, security staff, door supervisors and police officers. The profile of the excluded young person evidently coincides that of the deprived young person, but it also adds to it: in their search for "fashionable" and "suitable" clientele, venues are increasingly restrictive in terms of who they will admit, and exclusion policies have been expanded to take in appearance, age, etc. We shall return to this later on.

c) The third factor leading to violence is to be found inside the groups of young people who view themselves as the legitimate users of the leisure venue. Generally speaking it appears to be the result of clumsily handled quarrels between acquaintances and strangers who exteriorise rivalries and macho conflicts and who are settling roles inside the groups.

The conditions that can sometimes be found inside the venues (crushing, masses of people, in some cases overcrowding) are a determining factor in exacerbating emotions, so that treading on someone's foot or brushing against them can trigger an incident.

The distortion produced by alcohol and drug abuse is once again an essential factor in the escalation of conflict, as it leads to greater aggressiveness, lower tolerance levels and an inability to achieve reasoned conflict resolution.

Here an important factor needs to be stressed: due to the pricing policy of leisure venues (which is affected by the knock-on effect of trading costs, fitting out and maintaining the premises, administrative licences, personnel expenses, etc.) there is a tendency to consume alcohol outside such venues. The goal is to go into them when you are already "smashed", that is to say with the desired blood alcohol level, by drinking in bars before going to the venue or by purchasing alcoholic beverages from stores that are open until late at night and then drinking them in public spaces or in cars. Consumption of illegal drugs has also in many

cases moved outside the venues due to greater surveillance and control inside them.

Confrontations between night-time leisure facility patrons are frequently low intensity affairs and in general do not have an undue effect on the future relations of the contending parties.

Such incidents often begin inside the leisure venue but are in most cases spotted in advance by security staff and the young people are separated and in some cases ejected from the premises. This is a key moment in managing the aggression process, as if the security guards or door supervisors fail to take the precaution of ensuring that the opposing individuals or groups do not run into each other in the street, there is a very high probability that the fight will continue there.

The direct participation of young women in acts of aggression and fights, whether it is as victims or as aggressors, remains low.[5] Nevertheless, the presence of females in leisure contexts is a key factor in the explanation of violence, even though their role does appear to be ambivalent. On the one hand they can trigger conflict (by "flirting", "provoking", or macho reactions of frustration, showing-off, possessiveness, etc.) while on the other they can function as a force for mediation, pacification and stabilization in the face of youthful testosterone-fuelled excesses. Their presence or absence (and consequently the diversity of group composition) has a strong impact on the denouement of conflicts. As the partying itinerary advances and it gets later at night, the quantity of alcohol and drugs consumed goes up and the number of young women

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[5] Some reports show a high perception of young women as victims of aggressive seduction strategies. Nevertheless, there are few references to sexual assault, undesired sexual relations or the exchange of sexual favours for money or drugs. This is unquestionably one of the topics that will have to be looked into in greater depth in the context being studied here, in order to determine whether the phenomenon is really not significantly widespread or whether, as might be imagined, a veil of silence has been drawn over the issue.

declines. Such an equation leads to greater and more serious disputes due to the coming together of a lack of attitudinal control and the frustration of sexual objectives (whether real or symbolic).

In short, interpersonal disputes tend to vary depending on the type of leisure areas and the point on the partying itinerary.

The most peaceful locations appear to be those which are closest to city centres, as these tend to be places that are open earlier at night and have a greater presence of older people (who will often round off their night out in such venues) and where alcohol consumption is still at low levels.

In large-scale leisure venues, which are usually frequented later on at night, there are larger numbers of people; a build-up and increased effect of the alcohol and drugs that have been consumed; and an upsurge in competitiveness and expectations of various sorts (sexual, the desire to have fun, etc.). These factors, in conjunction with others, give rise to a greater number of incidents, more tumultuous altercations and an increase in the severity of violence (when it does occur).

As noted above, these conflicts are heavily policed by security staff inside venues. By contrast, problems appear to become exacerbated in public spaces in what might be termed "border" territories or "transit areas", that is to say spaces in which the areas described above either adjoin or which coincide with the end of the partying session, and in which control and dispersal mechanisms (especially transport services) are more limited.

As for leisure models, from the historical perspective there was a major change in the mid-1990s. The emergence of a sufficient mass of young people with greater disposal income or who decided to revamp their consumer spending habits contributed to an expansion of the night-time economy. The business generated by leisure consumption is extensive. Direct interests include,[6] but are not limited to: bars, pubs featuring music, discotheques, large clubs, small businesses selling food and alcohol, street vendors, and the public sector, which charges for permits and licenses, and security companies.[7]

Nevertheless, the growth in the night-time economy entails the risk of disputes which, as noted above, are inherent in the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and in packed venues, and an increase in tension between social groups (especially due to problems with local residents). In recent years this has led to social and institutional pressure on venues to improve their conditions (sound-proofing, control of maximum capacity and opening hours, etc.) and to reduce conflicts and security problems.

The two basic methods used by leisure entrepreneurs to "pacify" their venues have been to increase the number of security staff and to remove their most problematic patrons. As for the former, in recent years governments have put in place measures (about qualification, training...) to enhance the profile and professionalism of such personnel, as the excessive use of force by some leisure venue employees was a frequent source of conflict with patrons. In terms of the latter, customer selection is not only a method of risk prevention but also a means of creating "exclusive" offers, which essentially means choosing those young people who have greater financial clout and who meet the ethnic, social and aesthetic criteria deemed

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[6] That is to say, leaving to one side the host of supplier companies and businesses, ranging from the food and beverage sector to cleaning services and taking in inspections, certifications and security control (extinguishers, doors, cameras, etc.)

[7] To these should be added, from an entirely different point of view, illegal activities such as drug dealing and theft.

appropriate to achieve a "good atmosphere" in the venue.[8]

This selection strategy appears to be impacting especially on those in the youngest age group. A combination of their low purchasing power and the fact that they are seen as more problematic by entrepreneurs is restricting the supply of leisure facilities geared towards them, even though demand for such facilities is highest precisely in this group.

Thus at a time in which the construction of the social and cultural identity of young people is increasingly linked with their participation in fashionable leisure offerings, discriminatory practices have the effect of feeding frustrations and feelings of injustice and resentment; or to put it another way, of increasing the level of conflict in public spaces.

Overall, the research project reveals that in the majority of cases analysed there has been a net improvement in the conditions of venues and in the profile and professionalism of leisure entrepreneurs, venue door supervisors and security staff. However, excessive zeal in client selection is restricting the leisure opportunities of large sectors of young people: those who are not satisfied with what is being offered by other consumer facilities (and here we are referring in particular to shopping malls) seek alternative leisure options in public and private spaces.

Turning to public security policies, as noted above there has been an increase in the

regulation and control of venues in recent years, albeit with different degrees of application (including within the same country), to ensure that they fulfil requirements such as sound-proofing and keeping within capacity limits, not selling alcohol to people aged under 18, the prohibition of drug dealing, improved security staff recruitment procedures and regulating the right of admission. This process also has the effect of "selecting" the entrepreneurs, in the sense that it forces out of the leisure market those who cannot financially afford to meet the costs of complying with these conditions.

In this stage, security in leisure zones is organised around two main aspects: the venues and young people. In the latter case intervention measures essentially involve action by the police and are geared towards reducing risk factors (control of drunkenness, police monitoring and presence in areas with a large number of patrons, etc.) in the case of "normal" patrons, and additional control measures for groups of "problematic" young people.

Following on from this stage featuring strong governmental control of leisure venues, a new stage is taking shape in which coordination and cooperation between leisure entrepreneurs and the public authorities is being strengthened, and at both the operational and institutional level both actors increasingly recognise the other as an interlocutor.

At the operational level, "professional" venues are seen by the public authorities, especially the police, as useful partners, and they are asked to take an active role in preventing and managing security conflicts and problems both inside their venues and when patrons are gaining access to them.

In a few of the cases in the study, some coordination and mediation mechanisms not involving the police were also identified and which consist of a broader range of actors (residents, traders, young people) together

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[8] The ethnic variable does not always appear as an insurmountable barrier to gaining access to venues. In countries where the immigrant population has put down stronger roots, young people of ethnic origin (usually second or third generation immigrants) who have demonstrable disposable income and can adapt to the image and group requirements imposed by venues can get through access filters. What therefore appears to be the determining factor is the association of this variable with considerations (very often appearance-based) which social perception associates with marginalisation and risk.

with the authorities and entrepreneurs. Such mechanisms appear to have a beneficial effect on reducing the conflicts and tensions associated with these areas.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS[9]

- The problems most frequently associated with night-time leisure areas are conflicts (noise, annoyance) with local residents.

- Strong linkage between violence and leisure areas is not confirmed. There are incidents but when they do occur, young people demonstrate an adequate capacity for self-regulation.

- Some groups of young people (immigrants, from deprived neighbourhoods or backgrounds) are most identified with delinquency and violence in leisure areas. Nevertheless, there are other sources of interpersonal disputes in these areas: being excluded from festivities/established groups as well as between or inside established groups.

- Due to a stiffening of customer selection criteria, the growth and diversification of leisure facilities seen in recent years does not appear to have led to greater integration of some sectors of young people in leisure areas.

  There is in particular a trend to reduce the provision of leisure facilities geared towards young people who have less disposable income and are more associated with the generation of conflict.

  Going out facilitates the release and exteriorisation of everyday frustrations. It is also an important factor in young people's socialisation and identity construction. As a result, the exclusions produced by the

leisure industry are a source of frustration which contributes to the increase in conflict. Institutions need to reach agreements with the leisure industry in order to extend the provision of leisure facilities to currently excluded sectors.

- Conflicts between night-time leisure facility patrons may stem from prior rivalries, matters of honour, jealousy and macho fights.

  Women play an ambivalent role in incidents: they are often the source of disputes, but they are also a strong force for making the atmosphere more pacific. They are rarely involved, either as victims or as aggressors, in fights.

  The conditions inside leisure venues (large crowds, heat, etc.) help to inflame passions so that unintentional contact may also set off conflicts. Consumption of alcohol and other drugs is confirmed as a factor that intensifies conflict. A movement of such consumption to locations outside night-time leisure venues has also been found.

- Governmental regulation and control of venues, in terms of issues such as fitting out premises, controlling the number of people allowed in, opening hours and the training and qualifications of security staff, have positively contributed to the improvement in the atmosphere in venues and in the profile of their security employees. Both factors lead to a smaller number of conflicts inside and in accesses to venues, and they also help to reduce tensions with local residents in leisure areas. Consequently, maintaining a policy of government actions designed to achieve a quality supply of leisure facilities would seem to be the right approach.

- There is also a need to view alcohol as a public health problem in itself, and for it to be given at least as much priority as that afforded to illegal drugs. Controls on the promotion and provision of alcohol in commercial and leisure venues must be

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[9] We would like to thank Josefina Castro, Cândido da Agra and Eric Marlière for their contribution to this section.

supplemented by primary and secondary prevention campaigns which have input from young people in their planning, application and assessment stages.

- Conflicts vary depending on leisure areas and times; they are more frequent in areas with a higher concentration of leisure venues and also later on at night as the effect of alcohol and drug consumption, tiredness and the frustration of young people's expectations, combined with a greater predominance of males, takes effect.

- The challenge for the future is to an increasing extent conflict management in public spaces linked to night-time leisure. Public policies cannot merely "cordon off" leisure areas, draw up by-laws, install lighting and video surveillance cameras and bring in more police officers. Some of these measures may perhaps be necessary assuming this can be shown by studies, but it seems much more promising to look into and put in place feasible measures for reducing overcrowding and integrating leisure into the urban fabric and for setting up multi-purpose facilities equipped with adequate public and private services.

- Further empirical, systematic, interdisci-plinary and comparative research work, whether at the national or international level, is recommended in order to increase knowledge about the issues discussed here.

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