Out of sight, out of mind?
Awareness space and mobile offenders

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Liège, ESC Conference 2010
Overview

• Awareness space

• Research question

• Method & rationale

• Results

• Conclusions and implications
Awareness space

• Offenders operate in the vicinity of their homes: cost-benefit
  ▪ Travelling takes time & money

• Also: they know the neighbourhood
  ▪ Know where the suitable targets are located
  ▪ Know escape routes

➔ Brantingham & Brantingham (1981): “Awareness Space”
Research question

• Influence of awareness space has been observed for the most common patterns (= for offenders that operate near their homes)

• RQ: Does it also count for offenders that travel further?
  ▪ Do these offenders
    a) have a larger awareness space, or
    b) operate outside their awareness space (cfr. Rossmo, 2000)?
Methodology

• Semi-structured interviews with 21 Romanian offenders of property crimes
  ▪ In Belgian prisons

• Why Romanian?
  ▪ Particular crime phenomenon in Western Europe: ‘Itinerant Crime Groups’
    o Mobility between countries
  ▪ Previous research
    o Mobility during crime
Results

• Anchor points
  - Most offenders have travelled to several countries
    - Either have lived in these countries
    - Or travelled to these countries for a short time and with criminal intentions
  - Various types of anchor points: apartments (on their own or with groups), with friends, abandoned buildings, railway stations...
    - Offenders that travel with criminal intentions often have little luxury
    - Anchor points (or at least regions) are mostly fixed during their stay in a certain country
Results (2)

- Crimes
  - Burglary, car theft, shoplifting, pick pocket

- Targets
  - Easy-to-enter houses: secluded, no alarms, no dogs, no residents
  - Importance of wealth is not straightforward
  - CRAVED (Clarke, 1998): jewellery, small electronics, money,...

⇒ Not different from other offenders
Results (3)

• Journey-to-crime: both nearby and further away ➔ often at 30-50km

• Sometimes because they have reasons to travel
  ▪ Meeting old friends
  ▪ Looking for work

➔ Although they travel with non-criminal intentions, they have just been there once. The area can hardly be called a part of the ‘awareness space’
Results (4)

• Often they travel with no particular reason,
  ▪ Have offended there before (= awareness space, although no development through non-criminal activity)
  ▪ Just driving around, searching for targets

⇒ They do not offend in areas that are part of a traditionally developed awareness space.

⇒ Because they have not been in Belgium for a long time, they have little to no awareness space at all
  ▪ Knowledge is abstract (e.g. quiet, rich) or lacking
Conclusions

• RQ: Does the influence of awareness space also count for offenders that travel further?
  ▪ No: These offenders operate outside their awareness space
  ▪ ... but often have little to no awareness space at all

• Awareness space gives offenders a geographical framework for target selection

• Lacking this allows them to follow another approach for target selection
  ▪ not bound by awareness space and all that is related to it, only by opportunity/risk