

LOCAL VICTIMISATION SURVEYS AND CRIMINAL POLICIES

Renée Zauberman¹

Introduction

It may seem somewhat paradoxical to address an international group, and a Conference substantially devoted to the scrutiny of the results and implications of the International Crime Survey, on the subject of local victimisation surveys.

This should not be viewed simply as a sign of the specific French approach to issues of criminal justice policy - and a plea was made for this specificity in the discussions during the Seminar on Understanding Crime held in Rome in March 1992 - but more basically, as a felt need, given the current flood of surveys, to take a look at the articulation between the different levels at which they have been conducted over more than a quarter of a century.

It is a fact that we now dispose of large amounts of apparently quite heterogeneous data, collected either on a local or a national scale, and more recently on the international scale, with no effort to co-ordinate these various undertakings. There is nothing surprising about that: following the pioneering American research, a number of countries have jumped more or less rapidly into the vast field of victimisation surveys, with extremely variable resources, ambitions, needs, and in fact even conceptual frameworks and methods.

The great innovation of recent times is of course the international survey, which aims at overcoming disparities both in official statistics and in national victimisation surveys, for comparative purposes. Even supposing that the specific methodological difficulties it raises could be solved, this does not imply the intention for the international survey to replace the other levels at which surveys are conducted. The more countries are embraced by the comparison, the greater is the necessity to disregard national peculiarities, and therefore to simplify the data collected. Furthermore, budgetary and practical constraints make it impossible to examine, for each country, all of the questions which might be included in a national survey.

On the other hand, its very existence may foster reflections on the coherence of the different levels at which data are collected and analysed. Indeed, there cannot be any abstract comparison of the advantages and drawbacks of local, national and international surveys: they are not interchangeable. Each has its own value, depending on the use to which the results are to be put: a telescope and a magnifying glass are not used to look at the same objects.

What, then, is the position of local surveys in this respect, and what may their function be, in comparison with other survey levels, and particularly in the perspective of criminal policy? These two questions will be addressed here.

Various uses of local surveys: a tentative typology

¹ Research Officer, Centre for Sociological Research on Penal Law and Institutions (CESDIP), Paris, France.

Local victimisation surveys have existed since this scientific movement began, but they vary considerably. They may be divided into two categories, depending on the role played by the decision to investigate a geographically limited area in the conception of the survey. In the first case, the worker must resign him/herself to the local nature of the survey; conversely, in the second, he/she chooses to investigate a local situation, but with a number of possible objectives.

Local surveys out of necessity

Many surveys are local out of necessity : their local character is secondary and anecdotal, and we will discuss them succinctly. These may be of two types: test research and "poor" research.

- *Test research*

Test research is probably the most ordinary and least visible type of local survey. In its simplest form, it aims at testing a questionnaire on a small sample. This ritual phase of the implementation of a quantitative technique is not necessarily published.

In more elaborate instances, the strategy is more ambitious and aims at testing the entire project, including the survey instrument itself: the sampling and data collection techniques. Here again, the local features have no significant effect on the conception of the research itself, nor on the interpretation of findings. A typical example of this is the Dayton-San Jose Pilot Survey of Victimization, one of the test surveys of the National Crime Survey, which claims:

The purpose of the Dayton-San Jose Pilot Survey was to provide, in two different metropolitan settings, a full field test of methods and techniques as well as of the survey instrument itself. Because of the experimental nature of the Dayton-San Jose Pilot survey, the data collected were to some extent a by-product of the operation. In fact, the quality of the data was intentionally jeopardized to provide a rigorous test of different interviewing procedures².

- *"Poor" research*

Local research has frequently been a last resort to which scholars resigned themselves due to a lack of the resources necessary for a more ambitious survey. The scope of such research varies considerably, however, since poverty is a very relative notion³: all that the monograph prepared by an isolated researcher for a thesis⁴ and the *Stuttgarter Opferbefragung*⁵ have in common, is the regret at not

² LEAA (1974) Crimes and victims. A report on the Dayton-San-Jose survey of victimization, pp. 1-2, US Department of Justice, Washington.

³ The notion of "poverty" in no way implies a judgment as to the quality of the actual work.

⁴ Morange, E.R. (1979) La criminalité réelle à Aix-en-Provence, Thèse de doctorat de 3eme cycle en droit, Aix-en-Provence.

having conducted a national survey and the hope that the findings be projected on a broader geographic unit. Stephan⁶, for instance, believes that the structural similarity of crime in Stuttgart, in the Bade-Wurtemberg and in West Germany as a whole makes the generalisation of his local findings legitimate.

⁵ Stephan, E. (1976) Die Stuttgarte Opferbefragung, BKA Forschungreihe, Wiesbaden.

⁶ Stephan, Die Stuttgarte..., op. cit., p. 52.

Local surveys out of choice

The situation is quite different for surveys in which the choice of a local field is clearly deliberate. In this case, a restricted geographic location is sought because some questions may be investigated extensively and in depth. Also in this case, these can be of two types, depending on whether the main concern is methodological or whether the real interest is a specifically local situation.

- *The local experimental survey*

This is the case when the local survey aims at exploring several theoretical and/or methodological issues: although financial considerations may of course contribute to this choice, the local monograph is preferred because the parameters of the situation seem to be more easily controlled.

The survey done in Grenoble by Lagrange and Roche⁷ is a good example of local research for theoretical purposes. Their underlying hypothesis is that the feeling of insecurity⁸ is closely linked to the type of interpersonal sociability. Modern urban sociability is characterised by unconnected relations, varying according to the different social roles of individuals, resulting in a proliferating network which protects people from a feeling of insecurity. Conversely, the less diversified forms of sociability that typify rural society, in which the various spheres of everyday life are more integrated, tend to feed the development of feelings of insecurity. This hypothesis places the geographic variable at the heart of the research strategy, and obviously requires the selection of a matching diversity of places. Similarly, when Tuck and Southgate attempted to determine the differences between Whites and West Indians concerning the victimisations they experienced and their relationship with the police, they chose a Manchester neighbourhood inhabited by the two groups, thus controlling the key variable, the surrounding environment.

The case of the local experimental survey for methodological reasons may be illustrated by the research done in London by Sparks *et al*.⁹ The purpose of this research was to check on the ability of different social groups to produce the judgements required by questionnaire-based victimisation surveys. The reliability of victimisation surveys rests not only on the supposition that the various social groups have a sufficiently uniform ability to verbalise and to remember, but also on the existence of sufficient consensus as to their representation of the phenomenon that is being measured through their statements. Hence the choice of an experimental approach, based on the investigation of areas that are extremely

⁷ Lagrange, H. and S. Roche (1987) *Baby alone in Baylone. Deux perspectives d'analyse du sentiment d'insécurité: Système d'attitudes et formes de sociabilité en milieu urbain*, Vol. I, CERAT, Saint Martin d'Hères; Lagrange, H. and S. Roche (1988) *Baby alone in Baylone. Le sentiment d'insécurité en milieu urbain et semi rural: les exemples de Grenoble et de Tullins-Fures*, Vol. II, CERAT, Saint Martin d'Hères.

⁸ The French commonly used syntagm *sentiment d'insécurité* widely embraces the Anglo-saxon notions of fear of and concern about crime.

⁹ Sparks, R.F., H.G. Genn and D.J. Dodd (1977) *Surveying victims. A study of the measurement of criminal victimization*, Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York.

different socially and ethnically, but which share the same urban setting (London), and therefore, have some major features in common¹⁰.

In the last analysis, the similarity of these two types of research resides less in their intrinsic interest in local situations than in the heuristic value of such situations as a variable. This differentiates them from the other type, which will now be discussed.

- *Policy-oriented local surveys*

These are surveys in which concern with a specific local situation is effectively the main motive, for operational purposes of crime prevention and control. Interest in theoretical or methodological experimentation is put aside, and the effort concentrates on providing policy-makers with a routinised tool for diagnosis and/or evaluation. But when a study is action-oriented there is no way around consideration of the political stakes involved in the issues of crime and safety from crime.

Diagnosis:

At first, surveys of victims were developed as an instrument for measuring crime, in replacement of administrative statistics. However, since citizens have now been approached directly for an evaluation of this problem, other aspects of the phenomenon could also be measured, such as fear of and concern about crime (possibly generated by it) and victims' relations with the agencies in charge of dealing with crime. They are, therefore, a "natural" diagnostic tool, so to speak, and quite logically, the desire arose to put them to a more precise use. For instance, in the 1970s, the LEAA used the National Crime Survey as an instrument to conduct a series of victimisation surveys in the major cities in the United States of America¹¹.

More recently, victimisation surveys have become a part of broader projects combining a number of approaches and aimed at establishing a complete assessment, a sort of check-up of the local situation. This is illustrated by an interesting example: the Policy Studies Institute survey¹².

The Policy Studies Institute survey, *Police and People in London*, was an attempt to study relations between the Metropolitan Police and the community it serves¹³. Its commissioning by the London police department itself, prior to the riots of the early 80s, is indicative of the concern within that institution which - aware of the fact that in order to control crime they relied on the participation of the population - feared a loss of its indispensable support, at least within some groups. An accurate diagnosis was needed of the extent of the problem and its causes, as well as some proposals for solutions. The research project was four-

¹⁰ Sparks et al., *Surveying...*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹¹ LEAA (1975) *Criminal victimization surveys in 13 American cities*, US Department of Justice, Washington; LEAA (1977) *Criminal victimization surveys in Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Houston, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New-Orleans, Oakland, Pittsburgh, San Diego, San Francisco, Washington, D.C.: a national crime survey report*, (13 volumes), US Department of Justice, Washington.

¹² Smith, D.J. and J. Gray (1985) "Police and people in London" The PSI report, Gower, London.

¹³ Smith and Gray, *Police...*, op. cit., p. 1.

sided: a survey of the London population regarding its contacts with the police; a participant-observer survey of a group of young blacks whose relations with the police were notoriously bad; a questionnaire survey of policemen; and finally, a field survey on police organisation and practices.

The survey on the London population aimed at describing all of citizens' interactions with the police: identity verification, crowd control, arrests, complaints, or any other occasional contact. The victimisation survey was, therefore, only one of the many aspects covered by the London survey and the crime rates presented were only a by-product.

Skogan's colossal assessment of some forty-odd problem neighbourhoods throughout the United States is rooted in the question that has periodically preoccupied researchers and policy-makers since the many local community crime control and prevention programmes were launched under the incentive and with the support of the LEAA: what must be done to improve the effectiveness of programmes requiring citizen involvement? This series of documentary and population surveys is predicated on the very broad hypothesis of a negative link between crime/incivility and the degree of social integration within the neighbourhood. It is grounded on several questions as to what triggers the spiralling deterioration resulting in the gradual disintegration of socially acceptable behaviour and social control.

For this investigation, the victimisation survey (to which many questions on incivility were added) is only one aspect of an inquiry aimed at diagnosing the seriousness of the local situation. The inhabitants' relationship with their neighbourhood is another important facet.

Evaluation:

Victimisation surveys are often used for the evaluation of local programmes following a diagnosis.

The Netherlands have a longstanding practice of including evaluative research when planning programmes on crime prevention to determine their effectiveness.

This has been the case for the policing programmes set up since 1976¹⁴. The implementation of a criminal policy programme - Crime and Society - was the highlight of the latter half of the 1980s: it emphasised the development of local prevention policies. Twenty-five million dollars were spent by the ministries of justice and of the interior to finance local projects, provided they be scientifically evaluated by independent research agencies supervised by the WODC. A "meta-evaluation" of 200 prevention projects was done in 1991¹⁵.

¹⁴ Spickenheuer, J.L.P. (1983) Foot patrols and crime prevention instruction in Amsterdam-Osdorp, RDC, The Hague; Fijnaut, C., E.G.M. Nuijten-Edelbroek and J.L.P. Spickenheuer (1985) Politie Misdaadbestrijding, WODC, 's-Gravenhage; Fijnaut, C.J.C.F., E.G.M. Nuijten-Edelbroek and J.L.P. Spickenheuer (1987) La lutte contre la criminalité par la police. Les résultats de vingt ans de recherches, *Déviance et Société* XI, 2:163-179.

¹⁵ RDC (1991) RDC research programme 1991/92, RDC, The Hague; Polder, W. and F.J.C. Vlaardingen (1992) Preventiestrategieën in de praktijk, een metaevaluatie van de criminaliteitspreventieprojecten, WODC, Gouda Quint, Arnhem.

In Rosenbaum's collection¹⁶ of studies on community crime prevention programmes, victimisation surveys also appear as a routine tool for measuring the effects of programmes, including changes in the frequency of certain offences, the intensity of fear of crime, trends in reporting, the state of relations between the police and the public, and so on.

- *The political stakes of local surveys*

The fact of preferring the local level in approaching the issues of safety from crime, places responsibility for these policies in the hands of the local authorities. However, this responsibility is more or less "natural"; it depends on the country's political/administrative organisation, how centralised it is and how much autonomous power its local officials have.

American publications in no way indicate that the definition and implementation of such set-ups may cause political conflict either at the local level or between the different levels of government.

Conversely, the European example is eloquent on how politically loaded this issue may be at the local level. At least two examples may be cited: one British, the other Spanish.

The Islington Crime Survey was commissioned by the Labour City Council of the London Borough of Islington¹⁷ to assess the extent of crime affecting this particularly under-privileged population, determine people's expectations with respect to the police, and examine police practices. National surveys were inappropriate for this use, since their findings could not be broken down to the municipal level.

The political purpose of this step is obvious: not to leave to the Tories the monopoly of the "law and order" issue, at a time when the left was in power in virtually every inner-city high crime area in Britain¹⁸. Taking the exact opposite tack of the prevailing Thatcherism, the authors favoured a policy aimed at protecting the most vulnerable groups: women, ethnic minorities, workers... And surprisingly enough for the continental left, they explicitly rooted their victimisation surveys in the tradition of the American Democratic presidencies of the 1960s, which initiated the first victim surveys and used them in their war against crime and poverty.

The Spanish case - or rather, the case of Barcelona - is less explicitly ideological, but is a more clear-cut expression of power conflicts. It expresses the will of a municipal government to play an active part in safety-related policies by asserting its autonomy with respect to the regional and national governments dominated by other political parties.

Since 1984, the Council for Urban Safety, followed by the executive agency for prevention programmes, developed a comprehensive prevention policy which attempted both to co-ordinate the work of the many social actors involved and to control, besides the local police, the local operations of the regional and, above all,

¹⁶ Rosenbaum, D.P. (ed.) (1986) *Community crime prevention: does it work?* (2nd edition 1988), Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi.

¹⁷ Jones, T., B. Maclean and J. Young (1986) *The Islington crime survey. Crime, victimization and policing in inner-city London*, Gower, Aldershot.

¹⁸ Jones et al., *The Islington...*, op. cit., p. 6.

national police departments. The victimisation surveys conducted since 1984 were initially justified as, paradoxically, the only way of obtaining information on crime to which municipal political officials could have access; the other sources (police and judicial statistics) were not easily accessible and usually were not broken down to the municipal level. Without accurate data on the spatio-temporal distribution of crime, city government would have been unable to tailor its management of urban safety¹⁹ and, in particular, this would clearly have been a crucial problem for the forthcoming 1992 Olympic games²⁰.

The victimisation survey was consequently portrayed as an eminently appropriate local instrument, particularly valued because it was the only one Barcelona officials were able to produce. In fact, the national police, whose duties are more clearly directed at repression, definitely perceived the attitude of the Barcelona mayor's office as challenging its own competency, since it quickly set up its own prevention programme in that city, which apparently consisted mainly of stricter patrolling²¹. Barcelona thus became the advocate of urban victimisation surveys. The recommendation that these be extended to all European cities was formulated following the meeting of the Permanent Assembly of local governments of the Council of Europe in that city in 1987.

In both cases, a local authority tends to set itself up against the higher spheres of government, the action of which is judged inadequate or inappropriate. Victimisation surveys are clearly a politically strong move: in the English case, to correct a conservative policy considered unfair; in the Barcelona case, to set up a prevention policy with the non-negligible advantage of giving the town hall control over all police forces. Conflicts of this type are probably relatively frequent, as are conflicts between local political groups. If an analysis has been carried out on this aspect of the problem, it is possible it could be found among the publications of political scientists.

This outline of the various uses to which local surveys are put shows that, over and beyond their use as a test or experimental instrument, they are increasingly often used by local communities as a routinised tool for evaluating local situations and programmes. France is no exception to this rule, as we shall see, although some difficulty is experienced in moving from theory to practice.

Toward systematic use of the magnifying glass: are French projects a model?

The French "model" for prevention

For the past decade or so there has been a growing tendency in France to hand over responsibility for prevention policies to the local, département and commune authorities. This movement is part of an overall arrangement in which responsibilities are decentralised and decision-making deconcentrated - from the

¹⁹ Alabert, A., J.M. Aragay and J. Sabate (1991) Encuestas de victimización políticas municipales de prevención de la delincuencia, in Instrumentos y metodología para el conocimiento del fenómeno delictivo, Institut d'Estudis Metropolitans de Barcelona, Barcelona.

²⁰ Larrauri, E. (1992) Prevention in Spain, Contribution to the GERN Seminar on new forms of crime prevention, Gent, Paris.

²¹ Larrauri, Prevention..., op. cit.

central level to the local level - and which, in turn, is the outcome of complex social and political processes. This tendency of prevention policies to "go local" is, among others, tied to the fact that the middle-class wage-earning categories, often working in the fields of education, health, urban development, and the arts, gained access to power, along with the Socialist Party, at the local and central levels. Their social and professional ethics place a high value on the daily life environment: the city and the neighbourhood, as the meeting grounds of the private and the public spheres²².

The unambiguous objective of transferring social policy-making to the local political echelons is to cut across the traditional administrative lines that define the action of different ministries. It is based on the theory of "comprehensive social action" developed in the early 70s. For this purpose, the leadership and co-ordination of social policies has been entrusted to a variety of interministerial-type agencies over the past 10 years. These were creatures of the moment and involved the participation of the pertinent governmental agencies as well as that of representatives of local communities and of citizens' movements.

The sphere of crime and safety was no exception. The crime prevention policy based on specialised prevention programmes, which dated back to the 1960s, had met its limits with the economic effects of the first oil crisis: the ensuing unemployment and social problems complicated the integration of at-risk groups such as youth and immigrants. Real estate speculation further compounded segregation by relegating the most vulnerable groups to under-developed suburban areas.

When the Socialist Party came into power in 1981 (for the first time in 25 years), the government saw the encouragement of local initiative as a way of "depoliticizing" this issue, which had tended to become an important element in left/right-wing controversy since the end of the 1980s. This policy was spurred by the report issued by the Commission des Maires sur la Sécurité²³, better known as the Rapport Bonnemaïson, named after the president of this committee and main spokesman for this policy. As Chevalier²⁴ points out, by giving the more pragmatic and locally-elected officials responsibility for policy decisions, endless discussion on the causes of crime were avoided, and mayors belonging to the opposition were drawn into devising consensus-based solutions.

At first (1983-1988), this policy was mainly in the hands of the Comité National de Prévention de la Délinquance (CNPD), headed until 1986 by Gilbert Bonnemaïson. Two other similar institutional set-ups completed this comprehensive social prevention policy: one in charge of the social and occupational integration of youth problem, the other involved in renovating dilapidated neighbourhoods²⁵. At the end of the right-wing government interlude (1986-88), the entire social prevention system was rewrought into a single structure, the Délégation

²² Chevalier, G. (1988) "L'intérêt central pour le local. Analyse des politiques socio-préventives en France entre 1981 et 1986" *Déviance et Société* XII, 3:237-267.

²³ Commission des Maires sur la Sécurité (1982) *Face à la délinquance: prévention, répression, solidarité*; rapport au Premier Ministre, La Documentation Française, Paris.

²⁴ Chevalier, L'intérêt..., op. cit., p. 262.

²⁵ Chevalier, L'intérêt..., op. cit.; Robert, Ph. and J.M. Renouard (1991) "Bilan des connaissances en France" in Robert, Ph. (ed.), *Les politiques de prévention de la délinquance à l'aune de la recherche. Un bilan international*, pp. 191-205, L'Harmattan, Paris.

Interministerielle à la Ville (DIV), whose very title is clearly indicative of the new emphasis on urban and suburban problems.

It was up to the CNPD, and later to the DIV, to foster the creation of, and activate a network of local, departmental and communal committees. Through the participation at the local level of a series of partners - belonging or not to public agencies, but concerned about crime prevention policies - these committees were to be a forum for dialogue and policy development. Although no systematic evaluation has been made of the existing 700 old communal committees²⁶, it is estimated that only one-third of them actually function.

Policy-making aids

One weakness of the French prevention set-up is the absence, so far, of reliable diagnosis and evaluation tools through which local policy-makers can choose programmes and measure their effects.

To begin with, policy-makers are poorly equipped for the collection and analysis of information which is both scattered and relatively inaccessible because non-public and frequently inappropriate. Statistical categories, like geographic boundaries, are designed to fulfill the needs of the agencies that produce them, and are not necessarily relevant to peculiar local situations. Hence a first requirement: the collection and interconnection of existing data in order to detect and fill existing gaps²⁷.

Concern with the evaluation of public policies - which have developed recently in France - has led to the creation of a specific structure called "observatory", in which information pertaining to a given problem or territory is collected and analysed. One offshoot of this is the "local observatory on safety", and the proposal, by a working group convened by the DIV, that a local safety diagnosis be established through comparison of the public sector of safety with the population's demand for it²⁸.

- *The local victimisation survey within the local diagnosis of safety*

It is only one facet of this overall diagnosis. Since cities dispose of limited amounts of money to devote to this type of investigation (even if they receive state aid), surveys cannot aim at establishing a crime count because they are usually confined to a small sample. Conversely, local victim surveys can make a certain amount of information available to policy-makers:

- 1) the impact experienced by people who have suffered a certain number of victimisations; this also includes incivilities: those tiny encroachments on everyday life which are not necessarily legally incriminated, but which can make life quite uncomfortable, like littering, vandalism against public facilities such as

²⁶ France, it should be recalled, is composed of 36,000 *communes* located in 100 *départments*, which in turn form 22 *regions*.

²⁷ Robert, Ph. (1992) "L'avenir des enquêtes locales" La prévention de la criminalité urbaine, Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille.

²⁸ Donzelot, J., Ph. Estebe, H. Lagrange, D. Monjardet and R. Zauberman (1990) Diagnostic local de sécurité. Eléments de cahiers des charges, DIV, Paris.

'phone booths, letter boxes, elevators, basements, etc. and which, by exasperating people, contribute as much as actual crime to feelings of insecurity;

- 2) for those confronted with a crime or incivility problem:
 - what type of resource is seen as possible or desirable;
 - what type of resource is resorted to;
 - which are the expectations with regard to those solutions;
 - what evaluation do victims make of the available resources;
- 3) concerning the two latter points, the diversity of expectations and evaluations that can be found in a population must be stressed. For example, victims of a burglary who file a complaint with the police and are told they are the thirteenth case in the week and that, anyway, nothing can be done, may react very differently:
 - take the case very calmly, with detachment, knowing they are going through a formality aimed, at least, at providing them with a certificate for their insurance company, they actually mind very little about police inertness; or else
 - view the case as of the utmost importance: some victims are much concerned with police action, are anxious to see the criminal justice institutions function effectively, and express punitive expectations when reporting offences.

Safety expectations cannot be the same for shop-owners in a shopping mall and jobless youngsters who gather daily in that mall.

Victim surveys can provide, at the local level, a more accurate picture of the diversity of behaviours, expectations and evaluations and, thus, break up the overly legal uniformity of the notion of "victim". But this series of information is insufficient in itself to devise a local prevention policy and should be confronted with other information such as:

- 1) measures of police efficiency through the clearance rate;
- 2) the system of constraints in which crime prevention has to be devised and implemented:
 - a) the state of the local labour market, with indications on the:
 - performance of the educational and training system, especially about their exclusion mechanisms;
 - chances of access to a stable job, with its consequences for young people with no specialised training;
 - b) the state of the land market, with its consequences on urban integration or segregation;
 - c) public attitudes and policies towards migrants; in other words, racism.

The idea is to collect and confront otherwise dispersed data, and even further to examine them against the background of a larger set of demographic or sanitary statistical surveys.

- *A test and a project*

In this perspective, the DIV thought it would be useful to develop a sort of "toolbox" for local policy-makers, containing a number of reliable, standardised decision-making aids.

This originally led to the development, by the CESDIP in 1989, of a highly simplified version of its national victimisation survey questionnaire. This tool was tested twice, in two different fields: a town in suburban Paris, and a regional metropolis²⁹. A report on these was presented last March in order to place in perspective the ICS findings for France.

Following this, DIV asked a working group to prepare a complete design for a local observatory on safety³⁰. Two instruments were developed:

- 1) a series of 7 information cards, to be completed by municipalities, and covering the following points:
 - police: police statistics on different property and personal offences and infringement on various administrative regulations; data on local police resources, their distributions in time and space; data on private security guards;
 - justice: resources available and case-load;
 - social services: resources available and case-load, especially for drug abuse;
 - educational system: data on the integration of juveniles in the school system;
 - housing and housing authorities: data on the management of existing subsidised housing (population, maintenance, rehabilitation);
 - municipal services: data on complaints filed with the city for social problems, insecurity and incivility; data on public transportation (fraud, vandalism);
 - socio-demography and employment: data on unemployment and unemployment benefits;
- 2) a questionnaire survey: this is the above-mentioned test questionnaire, to which questions on incivilities and feelings of insecurity have been added.

This project is valuable in that it combines different approaches to the issue of safety from crime: while it closely scrutinises crime, its occurrence and treatment by the population and the competent agencies, it also considers the local socio-economic context.

A first experimental phase is planned, in a limited number of places (probably 5, of different sizes). In each location, a local team will be in charge of collecting data and analysing them in accordance with the needs expressed by the local crime prevention committee.

In addition, a team in the area of the DIV will be in charge of providing technical assistance to the local teams, making sure the surveys are conducted properly and, above all, proceeding with a systematic and thorough exploitation of the local data. Furthermore, it will be responsible for conducting national victimisation survey using an instrument very similar to the one used in the local surveys, and the results of which should put the local situations within a national perspective.

²⁹ Robert, Ph., R. Zauberman and P. Lew-Fai (1991) *Enquêtes locales de victimisation: deux tests en milieu urbain*, CESDIP, Paris.

³⁰ Lagrange, H., Ph. Robert, S. Roche and R. Zauberman (1992) *Note méthodologique sur les observatoires locaux de sécurité*, CESDIP, Paris.

Finally, a mixed group of DIV representatives, locally elected officials and researchers will draw conclusions from this experience and devise a model dossier for local observatories on safety. All communal crime prevention committees may then be provided with a standardised decision aid tool.

It is still too early to say whether the DIV will succeed in setting up a system for diagnosis and evaluation. We cannot overlook the fragility of the structure on which this ambitious project is based. The DIV (and the CNPD before it) designed to promote innovative approaches is placed alongside traditional governmental agencies which, furthermore, provide material and human resources. In such a position it faces two obstacles, the most obvious of which is the agency's vulnerability to political change: since it does not have the inertia of traditional government agencies, it can be eliminated or placed in suspended animation at any time.

The second obstacle, which is less visible but nonetheless threatens its day-to-day functioning, is that an institution of this type, composed of individuals chosen for their strong motivation, with no routine operations and procedures and often with no clearcut hierarchical organisation, is extremely sensitive to changes in personnel. The departure of a key figure may well disorganise the entire sector he/she was in charge of, disrupt patiently established ties with outside partners, and prevent any follow-up of previous action.

In other words, this type of institution has its advantages and its shortcomings, when compared with traditional government agencies: its innovative spirit, flexibility and lightness is offset by its fragility, improvisation and lack of administrative rigour.

Conclusion

We have attempted, in the present communication, to show that while local victimisation surveys are not new, they are now used in a way which makes them a peculiar part of the range of research instruments: further, they are increasingly often integrated in a comprehensive set-up for the diagnosis and evaluation of local situations and programmes. This new function is the outcome of emerging awareness of the importance of local communities in controlling crime and safety problems, illustrated by the present enthusiasm for community policing.

The importance of the local level should not be over-emphasised; in fact, the very definition of that level is problematic. What, actually, is the relevant level of social organisation for analysing and influencing the problems with which we are concerned? In France, prevention policies first concentrated on the neighbourhood; but many points raised by these interventions could not be solved at that scale: where employment, housing, education, safe public transportation or culture are involved, it is very often necessary to move up to the level of metropolitan area, or even of department³¹.

Excessive concentration on the local level may tend to prompt the anarchic multiplication of initiatives and the wasting of necessarily limited resources, with no gain for the community. A recent review of British prevention programmes notes the scattered nature of those initiatives that are not federated by the Home Office or

³¹ Donzelot et al., *Diagnostic...*, op. cit., p.4

some powerful organisation such as the NACRO: since they are ill-defined, poorly standardised, little known - because rarely published and made available to the community - they lose much of their social impact³². In fact, many communes do not have the proper tools or competent people on the spot for the analysis and evaluation of their problems. Hence the value of a central agency capable of co-ordinating initiatives and providing the skilled help needed. France is not the only country in which this type of set-up is based on collaboration between the local and the central levels. This is also the case in Great Britain and in the Netherlands, where the Home Office and the WODC, respectively, play this essential role of furthering, co-ordinating and evaluating local crime prevention programmes, which makes for a true national policy³³.

Hence, too, the value of combining local and national victimisation surveys. The functions of national surveys is two-fold:

- 1) fundamental research with no direct operational concerns: their design depends above all on the questions raised, as well as on the global state of knowledge and methods;
- 2) a more operational function, aimed at serving as a standard, or background, for regional or local surveys:
 - they enable local policy-makers to situate the peculiar juncture in which they operate in a broader perspective, and to weigh its portent;
 - they provide policy-makers at the higher institutional level with an overview of the situation, so that operations may be co-ordinated.

If this system is to be efficient, the national instrument and its local counterparts must be quite similar, to ensure the best possible comparability (the French project, as we have seen, is predicated on this axiom).

At a different level international surveys play a similar role by corroborating, for instance, the correlation between victimisation and urban development in a great many countries, or by validating the theory of criminal opportunities (on the basis of bicycle thefts, for instance), they yield a background for knowledge but have limited use in operational terms. Perceptions necessarily lose in refinement what they gain by embracing a wider geographic field (unless the financial investment is enormous), and there is less and less real grasp of specific situations. At most, they furbish the arguments of national policy-makers for their internecine political controversies over the choice of a particular policy by showing the seriousness of the nation's crime problem in comparison with other countries. The wheel then comes a full circle and it is up to them to make these policies operational at the local level.

³² Johnston, V. and J. Shapland (1992) The United Kingdom and the new prevention, Contribution to the Gern Seminar on new forms of crime prevention, Gent, Paris.

³³ Johnston and Shapland, The United..., op. cit.; RDC (1991) RDC research programme 1991/92, RDC, The Hague.

