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# DEVELOPMENTS IN DUTCH CRIME PREVENTION

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**Abstract:** *Since the mid-1980s, the Dutch government has placed increasing emphasis on crime prevention to curb the rising crime rate. New local, regional and national projects have been implemented. Some significant developments in terms of processes and outcomes of the crime prevention efforts are reviewed. Four examples of successful projects are discussed (prevention of shopping center deterioration, truancy prevention, reversal of neighborhood decay and use of surveillance officers in public transport). Meta-analysis of the project evaluations and additional information underline the advantages of prevention, but point also to some limitations of prevention as well as of the evaluation studies. Discussion is on some of the factors that will likely influence the possibilities for further growth, given the institutionalization of the preventive approach within Dutch criminal policy.*

## INTRODUCTION

**In most industrialized countries the numbers of interpersonal crimes have doubled every 12 to 14 years (Waller, 1991). The Netherlands has not been exempt from this increase. In 1965, police registered 1,362 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants. In 1985, this figure had increased to 7,473, and the figure for 1991 was 7,747 per 100,000 inhabitants. Until the beginning of the 1980s, the public and the government were essentially happy with this state of criminal affairs; compared to foreign countries, the crime rate was still low and most people approved of the low-key approach adapted to the problem. The death penalty is excluded by the Dutch Constitution, and the prison population was (and is) one of the smallest in the world. (In 1990, the rate of imprisonment was less than 10% of the American**

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rate; 40 as compared to 426 per 100,000 of the population.) Public and political discussion in the 1980s was concentrated on decriminalizing some aspects of abortion, squatting, euthanasia, drug use and homosexual relations.

More recently, crime has become a noticeable burden, and the situation is becoming less acceptable to the public. This is not surprising: Repeated theft of one's bicycle or car radio in a short space of time makes anybody less tolerant. In addition, the probability that the police will recover stolen property has become very low, as evidenced by the clearance rate, which declined from 51% in 1965 to 24% in 1985. For those people, especially criminologists, who thought that the rising crime figures might be due to improved reporting and recording of crime, results of the first International Crime Survey (Van Dijk et al., 1990) were quite a blow. The Netherlands appeared to have developed into a highly criminal country, though it must be noted that the enormous amount of bicycle theft partly explains this ranking, and that serious crimes like murder, rape, kidnapping, and organized crime were not included in the survey. (The murder rate, for example, is still low in the Netherlands, about 1 per 100.000 of the population. In the U.S., the number of murders and non-negligent manslaughters over the year 1989 was about 9 per 100.000.) Nevertheless, the conclusion was that crime now deserved new attention.

The combination of rising crime and a generally non-punitive attitude posed a particular problem for policymakers. Something had to be done, but simply employing more police and building many more prisons seemed both unacceptable and ineffective. Also, general social reform and rehabilitation had lost much of its credibility (Young, 1988). In response to this dilemma, there was a shift toward an approach that was underdeveloped and underused for a long time: crime prevention.

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF DUTCH CRIME PREVENTION**

The first evidence of this change of policy was that the police force set up a National Prevention Bureau in 1979, even though police prevention efforts remained little more than marginal (Horn, 1990). Far more important was the establishment in 1983 of a committee of experts (the Roethof committee) to reassess crime control policies. The committee recommended a strengthening of the national government's commitment to crime prevention, the involvement of private citizens and businesses, and the encouragement of interagency cooperation at the local level.

As a follow-up to these recommendations, an Interdepartmental Committee for Social Crime Prevention was set up in 1985. Its responsibility was to administer a fund of U.S. \$27 million to subsidize promising local authority crime prevention projects over five years. Crime prevention was given a broader meaning: The former exclusive orientation to (pre)delinquents was now amplified to include victims and situational factors. The new buzz words were: target hardening, crime prevention through environmental design, defensible space and opportunity reduction (Newman, 1972; Mayhew et al., 1976; Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981; Kube, 1986). Also, new emphasis was given to less formal social control within the community, e.g., by means of neighborhood watch, caretakers in building estates and surveillance by security firms (Hope and Shaw, 1988).

At the local level, primary responsibility for crime prevention was placed in the hands of the mayor, the head of the local police and the public prosecutor. Many of the larger municipalities set up crime prevention committees, comprising the aldermen responsible for youths and officials from the departments of town planning, education, and transportation.

Apart from new national initiatives like the distribution of a new quarterly journal on crime prevention, the development and supply of teaching packages about crime prevention, and the institution of a documentation center within the Ministry of Justice, the Interdepartmental Committee helped to fund about 200 local projects. In most cases these projects were co-funded by local means or by other ministries. For example, the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture launched some 25 local projects aimed at the social integration of high-risk groups, using street-corner workers to draw youngsters into meaningful recreational activities, education and work. Additional projects were geared to youngsters belonging to ethnic minorities, and special work projects were started for permanently unemployed youngsters.

Vandalism was targeted by about 40% of the projects, a common element of which were special school courses for children. Many of the remaining projects were targeted at shoplifting and theft of bicycles (e.g., by the provision of bicycle sheds manned by unemployed persons). In many cities, urban renewal programs and neighborhood watch schemes were supported. Many of the projects also assisted in the implementation of community service orders.

## FOUR CASES OF SUCCESSFUL PREVENTION

In order to give a more concrete idea of what was done in practice, four successful situationally oriented projects will be described here. They concern public transport, schools, public housing and shopping centers.

### Surveillance Officers In Public Transport

In the early 1980s, the Dutch public transport system began to experience a steep rise in the number of fare dodgers. At the same time, vandalism and aggressive behavior also increased sharply. To curb these phenomena, a new kind of official was introduced on tramways and the underground system: the VIC (the acronym in Dutch for Security, Information and Surveillance). The entry system for buses was also modified so that riders had no alternative but to pass the bus driver and present a ticket. The system was introduced in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague.

The evaluation study (Van An del. 1989) showed that the percentage of fare dodgers (passengers without a valid ticket or no ticket at all) fell in all three cities after the introduction of the 1,300 VICs and the change in boarding procedure. The case of Amsterdam is illustrative (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage of Fare Dodgers in Amsterdam Public Transport Before and After Introduction of Surveillance Officers**

	PERCENTAGE OF FARE DODGERS	
	Before	After
Amsterdam tram	18	9
Amsterdam metro	24	7
Amsterdam bus	9	2

The number of attacks and incidents of verbal abuse of drivers and conductors also decreased during the project. In addition, repair crews, passengers and staff all agreed that the introduction of VICs had stopped the upward trend in vandalism.

The VIC project created approximately 1.200 new jobs, which had the additional social benefit of reducing unemployment. Many of these jobs were given to disadvantaged groups in the labor market, such as young

people, women and individuals from ethnic minority groups with a low level of education.

Exceptionally, financial costs and benefits could be calculated fairly accurately for this project. The extra revenues from former fare dodgers are estimated at between U.S. \$7 and 8.5 million. The increased number of fines imposed by the VICs generated about U.S. \$0.7 million per year. Reduction of costs associated with vandalism is estimated at U.S. \$1 million. Savings on unemployment benefits amount to U.S. \$14 million per year, although this sum is not a direct profit for the public transport system. Even though the total profit of about U.S. \$23 million was exceeded by the costs of deploying the VICs (U.S. \$29 million), the difference can be seen as an investment in more intangible goals: the reduction of petty crime, a reduction of fear of crime and the promotion of the use of public transport.

### **Schools: The Truancy Project**

Truancy was chosen as a target of crime prevention for two reasons. First, truancy as such is a form of deviance deserving attention. Second, it is a well-established research finding that school failure, truancy and dropping out of school are strongly related to delinquent behavior (e.g. Rutter. 1979; Junger-Tas et al.. 1985). Further, spotting truants gives an opportunity to reach pre-delinquents and young delinquents in an unobtrusive, non-stigmatizing way.

In this particular project (Mutsaers. 1990). three schools providing vocational instruction were selected, as there were relatively many truants and dropouts in these schools. The first measure introduced was a computerized truancy registration system. Using this system, parents were called the same morning or afternoon to report the absence of their child. This was supposed to work in a preventive way for occasional truants, for whom the lack of controls by school or parents was too inviting. A second measure was the appointment of a school counselor who was responsible for the monitoring of truancy, disciplinary problems and imminent dropping out of school. The counselor discussed the youngsters at risk with the teachers and advised them on handling. A third measure was to make available a special class for truants, managed by a remedial teacher and a teacher of technical skills. The special program offered in this class was for a maximum of three months, in order to make

re-entry into the regular curriculum as smooth as possible. The effect on truancy can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2: Average Number of Hours of Truancy  
Per Student Per Week**

	HOURS OF TRUANCY PER STUDENT PER WEEK
Before measures (November-February)	1.4
<i>start of experiment</i>	
Measures partly introduced (March-June)	0.7
<i>summer holiday</i>	
All measures operational (September-December)	0.5

Much of the reduction in truancy followed soon after the introduction of the registration-and-warning scheme. Opportunity reduction by a simple increase in supervision and control appeared to be successful. For many of the truants, more regular attendance also helped to strengthen the bond between school and pupils.

### Public Housing: A Neighborhood Project

In common with the situation in other countries such as England (Bottoms and Wiles. 1086) and the U.S. (Skogan 1986). some of the subsidized, low-rent housing in Dutch cities, much of it in high-rise buildings, is plagued with problems: Managers (and residents) on these estates contend with decay, poor quality of construction and materials, poverty, rent arrears and crime. The preventive approach chosen in tackling crime was a mixture of target hardening and environmental redesign, as well as enhancement of social supervision. For example, the project in Delft (Elsinga. 1990) consisted of the following measures:

- (1) New recreational facilities for youngsters were arranged to be co-ordinated by a streetcorner worker.
- (2) Seven caretakers were appointed to intensify supervision, give information, issue warnings and keep the buildings clean.
- (3) By redesigning the whole area, surveillance of parks and streets was improved, buildings were made more vandalism-proof, and entrances of the buildings were made less accessible.

(4) Units that had formerly accommodated large families were redesigned for one- and two-person families in order to decrease the disproportionate number of youngsters in the neighborhood.

(5) No plans were executed without consultation of the residents.

The project began in 1985, and the measures were introduced successively, some within a short time span (e.g., caretakers), some over a period of years (e.g., redesign). All the measures were highly successful. The appearance of the buildings has been restored to a very acceptable level; residents, municipal authorities, and the estate management work together in a coordinated way: and the caretakers are able to maintain order and cleanliness. In short, all parties involved are happy with the result, and, moreover, levels of crime have decreased substantially (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Number of Offenses Reported Per 100 Housing Units**

YEAR	Number of Offenses per 100 Housing Units	
	Municipality in Total	Experimental Neighborhood
1985 (start of project)	33	74
1986	35	50
1987	35	32
1988	31	36

Nevertheless, there were also some unexpected costs of the project. The one- and two-person families did not integrate well with the existing population of the estate. Most of these new residents see their homes as temporary and have little interest in the neighborhood, and their somewhat different lifestyles give rise to complaints by the original inhabitants. A further problem is that while caretakers are well accepted, some residents are unable or unwilling to pay for their share of the work the caretakers do. Finally, the residents play little part in keeping the building clean. Cleaning up litter and other pollution is seen as the responsibility of the caretaker, not of the residents themselves (Elsinga, 1990).

Despite these costs, the project was seen as highly successful. As a consequence, the Ministry of Justice is contributing for a period of three years to the cost of employing 150 caretakers in local municipality high-rise flats experiencing serious social problems. These caretakers spend on average 30% of their time on cleaning, 25% on general surveillance, 20% on dealing with tenants and 20% on repair work. In the

majority of the cases, part of the costs of employing the caretakers is borne by the tenants.

From the overall evaluation of this policy (Hesseling, 1002) it can be concluded that employment of caretakers helps to reduce such problems as litter, vandalism, rowdyism, drug-related disorderliness, and theft from basements and mailboxes. This is reflected in the greater number of residents satisfied with the cleanliness of the estate, and in the social behavior of others. Though there has been no effect on the more serious forms of crime, such as residential burglary or violence, more residents are satisfied with the safety on the estates.

### **Retail Stores: A Utrecht Shopping Center**

In order to deal with persistent problems of theft, vandalism and burglary in a shopping center in Utrecht, a comprehensive crime prevention project was introduced (Colder, 1988), consisting of the following measures:

- (1) Provision of instruction for personnel and managers of shops concerning shoplifting.
- (2) Appointment of two security officers for the dual purpose of being consulted by, and giving assistance to, public and retailers.
- (3) Installation of an electronic alarm system for retailers, enabling them to warn both one other and the security officers.
- (4) A press and publicity campaign in support of the project.
- (5) "Alternative" penalties for vandals, and special court sessions for shoplifters.

**Table 4: Total Financial Losses Because of Crime Before and After Introduction of Crime Prevention Measures in Two Shopping Centers**

<b>Offenses</b>	<b>TOTAL LOSSES x \$1000</b>	
	<b>Before Prevention</b>	<b>After Prevention</b>
<b>Burglary</b>	192	130
<b>Vandalism</b>	57	26
<b>Shoplifting</b>	91	63

As can be seen from Table 4, the total costs suffered by retailers as a result of crime dropped considerably. Victim surveys among the shopping



public indicated that crimes against the public had also been reduced by 50% (Colder, 1988).

From an economic point of view the project seems to have been profitable for the retailers, as the savings produced by the crime prevention measure were greater than the costs of the two security officers. When the government grant came to an end, the retailers' association decided to continue funding the project. As in the case of the Delft housing estate project, the project in Utrecht has led to government support for similar projects across the country.

### EVALUATION OF THE PREVENTION PROJECTS

For all projects subsidized by the Ministry of Justice, evaluation is a requirement. The four examples described above amply fulfilled the requirement, but this has not usually been the case. In one meta-evaluation, only 31 evaluation reports from over 200 were considered adequate for inclusion, the majority providing only descriptions of the implementation of projects, or producing indecisive or unreliable crime figures (Polder and Van Vlaardingen, 1992). While disappointing that about 10% of all subsidies was devoted to research, this is not an uncommon result. For example, in reviewing evaluations of the effects of North American neighborhood projects, Rosenbaum (1988) concludes: "The primary reason why we do not know what works in community crime prevention. Is the quality of the evaluation research."

Despite the disappointing quality of many evaluations, the Dutch meta-evaluation concluded that preventive measures can be very effective (Polder and Van Vlaardingen, 1992), and that success is related to three factors. First, the preventive effort needs to be strong and intensive (one camera in a large shopping center will have no measurable effect). Second, the more serious the crime problem, the more difficult it is to get results with prevention (the behavior of people with a history of serious crimes is not easily changed by simple preventive measures). Third, increasing the perceived effort needed to commit the crime and the perceived likelihood of punishment seems to be a necessary element in successful projects. Examples of the third criterion include reduced accessibility, neighborhood watch and target hardening, combined with a sufficiently high probability of receiving some informal or formal sanction. The absence of this condition, for example, in projects that supplied only information or just extra facilities to youngsters-at-risk (graffiti zones, leisure centers.

assistance of welfare workers), nearly always produced negligible improvements.

Although these conclusions are similar to those of one other meta-evaluation (Poyner, 1991), some limitations should be noted. First, even in the research studies selected, in most cases a combination of preventive measures was applied. This means that an exact determination of the effects of specific measures was impossible. This points to a basic conflict of interest between researchers and practitioners. Evaluation researchers need clear-cut and specific measures, applied in a consistent way for some period of time. Practitioners, on the other hand, want a combination of measures to heighten the chance of overall success, and are inclined to change policies if unforeseen problems arise. The result is generally hostile to the most effective elements: Less effective, neutral and negative effects of other elements reduce the effectiveness of the best elements.

Another limitation concerns the "dark number" of successful measures—successes that did not reach the stage of an evaluation. Crime prevention measures, particularly of the situational kind, are often so inconspicuous that the measures and results are taken for granted, and no detailed research is involved. An example is provided by the problem of high-school students in a Dutch town who were responsible for annoyance, incivilities and petty crime during mid-day breaks in school hours. As there were several different schools close to one another, large groups of pupils were filling the streets: starting fist-fights with each other; scattering litter; shoplifting in a nearby shopping center; and vandalizing telephone kiosks, public benches, and fixtures in the park. Intensified police presence merely added to the excitement of the situation.

During talks involving shopkeepers, school principals, the police and municipal officials, a range of measures were proposed such as: creating a blacklist of core offenders; imposing heavier penalties on those arrested; closing down the shops during the mid-day breaks; and conducting a survey of the students to get a clearer picture of their motives, social backgrounds, attitudes toward school, etc. Before the plans could develop into a full-blown project, with the full complement of working groups, steering group, project coordinator and so forth, the school principals made a unilateral decision. They changed their class schedules so that break times for the different schools no longer coincided. The problems disappeared within a short time. All further plans were postponed, and no research was conducted.

In the same way, a host of similar, relatively modest, but effective situational changes can be cited. The obligation for moped drivers and cyclists to wear safety helmets unexpectedly reduced the number of moped and cycle thefts, since many thieves apparently do not come prepared with a helmet in hand (Mayhew et al., 1989; Walker, 1992). Record albums and CD cartons have been found to be far less vulnerable to theft when displayed without their contents. The provision of special public transport for those visiting rural disco-centers has been found to reduce drunken driving, incivilities and other problems around these establishments (Etman, 1990).

In sum, the Dutch research provides strong evidence that situational crime prevention has excellent potential to provide a more effective answer to present and future crime problems. Further convincing support for this position can be found in the international selection of 22 successful case studies collected by Clarke (1992).

### **AFTER THE EXPERIMENTS: INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

After five years of experimentation in crime prevention stimulated by the Interdepartmental Committee for Social Crime Prevention, the results in the Netherlands were seen to be sufficiently encouraging to continue the efforts. In 1989, a Directorate for Crime Prevention was established within the Ministry of Justice. This department is small, comprising about 20 persons, but is on the same bureaucratic level as other directorates for prisons, the police and immigration. With a permanent budget of about U.S. \$12 million, it has four main responsibilities:

- (1) Promoting crime prevention by municipalities and business.
- (2) Supporting police-based crime prevention.
- (3) Coordinating victim policies.
- (4) Regulating the private security industry.

Some of these responsibilities have been shared with other ministries. For example, the Ministry of Education is now active in promoting anti-truancy projects and is offering high schools financial incentives to introduce measures to prevent vandalism. The Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture is involved in programs for marginalized youths designed to reduce vandalism, alcohol and drug use. The Ministry of Economic Affairs has started a new program for the prevention of shoplifting, and the

Ministry of Transport has strengthened surveillance in public transport by a large expansion of the number of ticket collectors.

Especially noteworthy are the so-called "New Social Policies" being promoted by the Ministry of Interior Affairs, which consist of measures directed against unemployment, lack of education and inadequate housing in deprived neighborhoods. These locally administered projects intended to reduce deprivation include crime preventive elements such as improved surveillance, screening of new tenants, improved cleaning and maintenance, target hardening, and additional police services.

### **THE FUTURE OF DUTCH CRIME PREVENTION: SOME CONSIDERATIONS**

In the face of the challenge of rising crime, a widely supported policy shift to prevention was made in the Netherlands. A series of experimental projects were executed, exemplary successes were demonstrated and new policies were institutionalized in many sectors of society. Despite this progress, however, it must be recognized that in the Netherlands, as in all other industrialized countries, crime prevention is still marginal when compared to crime control through law enforcement. Based on the expenditures on police, courts and corrections in the U.S., the U.K., France, and Canada, Waller (1991) concludes that substantially less than 1% goes to prevention. In the Netherlands, where crime prevention has taken firm root in government policies, this percentage is still less than 2% of government spending on justice (Willemse, 1992).

It must also be acknowledged that demonstrated prevention successes are still limited mainly to small-scale projects. Large-scale crime reduction as a result of preventive policies has not been shown. This would require a much broader adoption of crime prevention measures, but this is unlikely to occur soon for the following reasons:

(1) The law enforcement approach is familiar, while the preventive approach is not. The long history of the former, probably based on a deeply rooted human need for revenge, has resulted in "get-tough" solutions becoming a conditioned reflex to increasing crime. Despite the "disastrous failure" (Waller, 1991) of crime reduction by means of deterrence and rehabilitation, the need for the criminal justice system is self-evident for the public and politicians alike. Added to this conservation force are the enormous vested interests in the contemporary criminal justice system.

(2) Awareness of the range of prevention measures is limited. For many people the concept of crime prevention is limited to a few preventive target-hardening measures (locks and bolts), and advice to avoid "dangerous" areas. The variety of measures, as implied by the two-dimensional classification of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and of offender-oriented, situationally oriented and victim-oriented approaches (Van Dijk and De Waard, 1991), is generally unknown.

(3) The belief in displacement is widespread. Situational measures in particular are widely seen as superficial, ineffective and leading only to displacement. Gabor's conclusion (1990), based on a thorough review of the relevant research, that complete displacement of crime has never been shown is by no means widely known or accepted. Equally striking is the disregard for the reverse of displacement, i.e., the "replacement" of incarcerated offenders by new groups of offenders (Anneveldt, 1991). The potential of controlled displacement as an instrument to distribute victimization more equally over the population is also seldom realized (Barr and Pease, 1990).

(4) An emphasis on the most dangerous and persistent adult offenders diverts interest from prevention measures. Hardened criminals with a long history of serious and violent crimes are indeed hard to influence by simple preventive measures. However, it is often overlooked that even the most serious criminals usually start by committing petty crimes and that a considerable part of all crime is induced by situational factors.

Despite these formidable obstacles to the spread of the preventive approach, its potential seems great—especially when seen in the context of its successes relative to problems other than crime. Many lethal contagious diseases in the western world have been extinguished, primarily by the construction of sewerage systems. Flooding in many countries has been eliminated by building dikes. Large-scale food poisonings have been reduced by regular inspections of food. The incidence of disastrous fires has decreased through building and urban design regulations.

Convincing empirical successes through prevention may lead to a fundamental shift in crime policy. In addition, the adoption of large-scale, effective prevention measures could liken the chances of becoming the victim of a serious crime to that of being hit by lightning.



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