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Editorial Introduction

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This Special Issue of *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal* started life as a panel of papers presented at the 7th Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology, held at the University of Bologna, September 2007. The panel, entitled `Understanding Communities: Defending the Local Against the Unifix Survey', brought together a number of challenging papers which addressed, in a range of ways, the complex relationship between the national and local levels of knowledge and understanding. This Special Issue introduces these contemporary insights and provides the reader with an opportunity to engage with a range of alternative theoretical, epistemological and/or methodological frameworks of inquiry, which not only defend the local against the `unifix' survey but which also explore the political implications of a more context-relevant approach.

There has been a noticeable trend in recent years to supplement the collection of national survey data and government statistics, with localised data on a range of issues such as fear of crime, confidence in criminal justice services or the impact of reassurance policing and crime reduction policies – in England and Wales such a trend is exemplified by the instantiation of a programme of `rolling strategic assessments' and local crime audits to be routinely produced by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Bringing the local `back in' attempts to identify differences

in national-local experiences as a marker of comparison and measurement across and within the national context. However, the renewed interest in the `local' has not merely shifted the level of analysis but has also revitalised an emphasis on localised, community-based policies and practice, which are increasingly positioned in the vanguard of crime control and prevention. As Hughes and Rowe put it:

> Criminologists, like sociologists before them, continue to fret over the nature, and the normative political effects, of community as a governmental appeal and technique and in particular its articulation in debates on policing, security and community safety …..
> on one hand there are the dystopian dangers of unreflexive communitarianism and on the other the potentially progressive potential of approaches to policing, crime prevention and community safety that focus on the communal and the local in an `age of diversity' (Hughes and Rowe, 2007: 318).

There is now a substantial and critical body of literature which debates the tensions, paradoxes and contradictions of `localism' and how far it represents a retrogressive and/or progressive force in working to prevent and control crime, and in fostering safe and secure community environments. Numerous studies have been published which critically examine the impact and effectiveness of different kinds of community-oriented approaches in the UK and elsewhere. These include, for example, commentaries on the conceptual ambiguity of `community policing' (Fielding, 2005); the potential tension between a community- or citizen-driven policing style and a policing regime driven by performance indicators and targets (Herrington and Millie, 2006); the emerging infrastructures of partnership approaches to governance (Crawford, 2006; Gilling and Schuller, 2007); the `rise and fall' of proximity policing in the Nordic countries (Holmberg, 2004); and the reconfiguration of organisational relations at the local level (Hughes and Rowe, 2007). This Special Issue contributes to this burgeoning field by discussing some of the limitations of `understanding communities' through the lens of national directives, performance indicators and targets; the prevailing requirement to identify local priorities by reference to an `all-purpose' (or `unifix') epistemological and methodological framework, tends to elide what may be community-specific with the effect that how any issue is framed, debated, perceived and addressed at the local level, may be lost from view.

Chris Kershaw introduces the Special Issue by discussing recent work undertaken at the Home Office which seeks to develop a new national crime database for England and Wales. This new crime statistics system has the potential to provide a more nuanced analysis of the circumstances of crimes at the local level. Rob Mawby turns our attention to the local dimension of criminal survey statistics, highlighting how frameworks based on national indicators and priorities can have the effect of ignoring the particularities and uniqueness of local areas. This is especially pertinent for understanding the crime and disorder problems experienced by communities in Cornwall, where the impact of tourism manifests in local variations in terms of the extent, breakdown and generators of crime. Liz Turner explores the relationship between a centrally-generated discourse of confidence (in criminal justice) and the scope, impact and usability of its application in a local context. Through a critical examination and deconstruction of the dominant discourse of confidence, Turner makes a persuasive case for developing alternative ways of knowing about confidence at the local level which have the potential to generate knowledge which is responsive to community imperatives, sensitive to local populations and beneficial at the local level. Stephen Moore provides important ethnographic insights into the ways in which a community-view is formed, negotiated and acted upon in the name of neighbourhood policing in an English city. In contrast to the other papers, Moore's study calls into question the `good sense' of empowering `the community' to determine priorities and set out local agendas to combat disorder. Andy Dale closes this issue with an eloquent and timely review essay of Gordon Hughes' *The Politics of Crime and Community* (2007).

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