

CRIME IN THE AREA

Abstract

Crime in urban communities remains a burning issue for multicultural neighborhoods of Los Angeles. This problem is closely considered in regards to Boyle Heights, the Los Angeles community which consists mostly of Latin Americans. The subculture approach to the study is taken as the dominant one. Such crime prevention activities as reshaping the public space and increasing its safety through Helms' Systems (2002), reconstruction of abandoned buildings into the objects of infrastructure, strengthening the connections between schools and population through local municipal government work and the like are suggested.

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Introduction

Crime in urban communities is quite a persistent issue, especially in regards to the multicultural neighborhoods in Los Angeles. The present paper aims to study the problem of crime in a particular community, and how the subculture approach can be served as means of identification of this notion. In our case, crime in Los Angeles can be explicitly demonstrated by Boyle Heights, the community which consists mostly of Latin Americans.

The subculture theory, which has been developed by Cohen in 1955 is an attempt to examine youth subcultures, manifesting their protest against the dominant culture.

The subcultures emerge in the slums of some nation's largest cities, often rooted in class differentials, parental aspirations and school standards. Cohen notes that the position of one's family in the social structure determines some problems which a child might face later in his life. Thus, they will experience status frustration and strain and adapt into either a corner boy, college boy, or a delinquent boy. (Eve, 1978, p. 116)

Corner boys are conventional in terms of lifestyle and, therefore, they receive considerable support in group activities. Such individuals often fail to meet academic standards and, thus receive poor education, which doesn't allow them to penetrate to the middle-class environment (Paulsen & Robinson, 2004).

Delinquent boys, on the contrary, form bands and gangs as an attempt to define social and group positions. They do not possess some specific aim; their disobedience and criminal behavior can be seen as purposeless to some extent, but, in fact, such young people steal in order to establish themselves as personalities and support their

hedonistic lifestyles. Again, the latter purpose is of less significance, compared to the manifestation of subculture identity. Moreover, corner boys can participate in theft and robbery to attain peer support, whereas most delinquent boys show subconsciously their “scorn” for middle-class values by means of stealing.

Residential patterns in Los Angeles refer to traditions, rather than models of communities, but Boyle Heights is an exception from the common rule. Initially this area was seized by Jewish Americans, and in 1980s they became replaced by Hispanic and Latino Americans. The community profile is nowadays depicted in quite pessimistic outlook, since it frequently endures funding deficiencies, high unemployment rates, as well as problems with universal access to public education. Therefore, using the framework, prepared by Paulsen and Robinson (2004) one can assume that the public space lacks safety patterns, taking into consideration the fact that the neighborhood has been substantially impoverished after the withdrawal of Jewish Americans, whose culture normally implies the development of domestic infrastructure (Vincent, 2008). The recent housing project, designed to address the needs of citizens dwelling in *The Flats*, or the poorest part of the neighborhood, failed not a long ago owing to the collapse of the American commercial sector supporting the long-term housing program.

According to Vincent (2008), “In 80s, he [the respondent] said, drug dealers trolled the neighborhood, drunks stumbled about and young gang members shot it out. One of his sons was assaulted once and his car was shot up one day” (p. 4). In these times, the criminality rate in this neighborhood is 30 per cent higher than the average Los Angeles index; this fact certainly causes the concerns of law enforcement agencies, but the efforts, ordered at the level of the city government, have appeared to be

insufficient, as the local police officers also belong to the specified community and often originate from the same circles as gang members (Vincent, 2008). Therefore, it is possible to speak about subculture identity in the given case; moreover, the criminal unit is vast in Boyle Heights and surprisingly covers the groups of non-delinquent profile (e.g. qualified workers, who remain unemployed, and are able to successfully earn their living).

The two major dimensions, the delinquent subculture is cultivated from are local schools and local construction sites. It needs to be noted, however, that the latter dimension reflects in some way the former one, as both actually depend on two undermining tendencies, which are the spread of unsound leisure practices and the inhibition of leadership inclinations in the majority of subculture members.

As the teachers of the community school suggest, it is not “fashionable” in Boyle Heights to have high academic achievement; on the contrary, the local leisure culture existing among school students, implies constant search for adventures till the late night. Therefore, underage community members simply have no opportunity to behave like “college boys”, as they normally fail to prepare their home assignments given the above described leisure culture. As mentioned above, the neighborhood has quite poor infrastructure that includes a number of abandoned shops or accommodations that served various “civilized” purposes in the past, but nowadays can be found half-ruined. These are major places of interest attributed to local young males, as insufficient budgeting has reduced the local educators’ motivation for arranging more useful and healthy leisure activities for students. According to Weisburd and Lum (2005), minimization of opportunities for the commitment of transgression is amongst the most

important components of crime prevention; in this sense, the abundance of uncontrolled places in Boyle Heights becomes a determinative factor is the persistence of the pathological identity.

Furthermore, the strength of the criminal subculture is increased by the size of the group of corner boys, described as the main “executors” in the gang, due to their compliance with the internal norms. Leadership skills are normally nurtured in families and classrooms; but the profile of the average community member (manual worker, non-management) points to the fact that the patterns of cognitive and emotional independence are not popular in the community; moreover, the lack of educational initiatives aims at raising students’ self-awareness, and determines schools failure to fully address the issue of leadership. The “college boy” identity is the major object of school students’ bullying, which might refer to the antagonism between the broad lower-middle class and relatively underrepresented class of white collars (upper-middle). The intensity of group pressure has already been depicted above: those whose lifestyles have been “intellectualized” and who have upgraded their socioeconomic background are often physically assaulted and their property becomes the target of vandalism (e.g. car destruction). These are the main reasons why the criminal subculture actually dominates in Boyle Heights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to provide several recommendations concerning the further crime prevention activities in this environment. First of all, it is necessary to reshape the public space and increase its safety through incorporating Geographic

Information Systems suggested by Helms (2002). The reconstruction of abandoned buildings into the objects of infrastructure is also plausible; in this case, businesses are more likely to jointly support the new mapping system for their own profit. Furthermore, it would be also useful to encourage employers to create more beneficial job opportunities and social security packages, including health care, partial compensations of house rent and so on. Furthermore, the local municipal government should work in the direction of the empowerment of the community educators for the strengthening of the connections between schools and population, so that more control over the students' out-of-school activities can be obtained. Finally, local law enforcement authorities are supposed to strengthen supervision and de-formalize policing management, so that commitment to crime prevention and reduction is reinforced between police officers (Schmerler and Velasco, 2002).

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