

Session II: Organised Groups and their new ways of communicating

“The Efus ‘EU Street Violence project’ and what we can say about the impact of ICT on the communication of troublesome youth groups”

Sebastian SPERBER, Programme Manager,
European Forum for Urban Security, France

Abstract

Created in 1987 under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the European Forum for Urban Security is the eldest non-governmental organisation of territorial bodies working in the field of urban security. Today, it brings together 300 members, from 18 countries. It has been contributing to raise awareness of the political and social dimension of urban security.

The aim of its “EU Reco Street violence” project is to make knowledge and good practice on violence committed by youth groups accessible to practitioners, academics and policy makers. To this end the project has gathered documents including analyses, recommendations and practices on the phenomena and undertaken an online survey amongst the Efus members. The project has allowed create an online database with more than 450 entries, which structures and makes accessible knowledge on the issue. The project started in spring 2011 is currently analysing the database content and will presented its results as part of the Efus international conference “Security, Democracy and Cities: The Future of Prevention”, to which ca. 800 policy makers, practitioner and experts form all over the world are expected December 12th -14th 2012 at Saint-Denis & Aubervilliers (Paris, France).

One of the key insights of the project is certainly that gangs or troublesome youth groups are first and foremost places for alternative socialisation for those at the fringe of society. While they also embrace deviant behaviour the main goal of a youth gang is usually not criminal activity. Rather the socialisation “on the street” provides for alternative ways of obtaining social status, self-esteem, power and recognition. This conclusion -shared by many researchers- implies significant space for prevention, community development and alternative justice. Promising practices seem to confirm the importance of a multi-agency strategy with a sound preventive component. However it seems hard to take into account the group dimension into these measures.

New information technologies bring in a new quality to the problems encountered with troublesome youth groups and can worsen them. However, as can be shown at the examples of the communication of gangs, of riots or spontaneous gatherings, new ICT are not a fundamental game changer.