

POLICING THE NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY IN SCOTTISH TOWNS AND CITIES

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Summary: Growing popularity of the night-time leisure industry in the UK as a result of changing social, cultural and economic patterns has created a situation where excessive alcohol consumption and public disorder and violence are commonplace. A growing body of research has examined these issues at length, however, this research focuses on the role of policing.

INTRODUCTION

This project is concerned primarily with the issues of control, regulation and public order in three separate case study areas and how those seeking to regulate and control the night-time economy, specifically the police, have responded. Using a mixture of qualitative – including multiple interviews and fieldwork with the police – and quantitative – statistical data sets – research methods, the projects main aims are to:

- Examine the regulatory and legal framework pertaining to the night-time economy (NTE) and assess how this has changed over time
- Define what constitutes the NTE in the case study areas by identifying the major areas of NTE activity and the corresponding facilities and amenities and how this has changed over time
- Identify the key stakeholders involved in, or effected by, the policing of the NTE of each of the case study areas including the police, owners/operators of bars/clubs and their private security and personnel, patrons of the NTE, A & E departments, licensing boards, planning departments of local authorities, taxi rank supervisors etc.
- With respect to these stakeholders examine:
 - Perceptions of the nature of the NTE in the area, with particular attention to views of crime and disorder
 - Perceptions of the policing of the NTE in terms of resources and deployment, challenges and effectiveness, and inter-agency co-operation
 - Perceptions of how the policing of the NTE might be made more effective
- Draw out the policy implications of the project findings for different stakeholders involved with policing the NTE

MAJOR FINDINGS TO DATE

This overview provides a short summary of the findings from the first case study. Research was conducted in 'Southville', a town in the south of Scotland, over a period of three months from July to October of 2008 and examined the issues relating to the NTE, focusing specifically on aspects of regulation and maintenance of public order and safety.

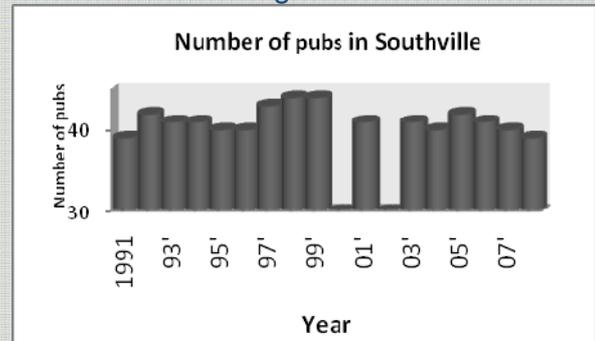
'Southville' & its NTE

- Southville has an active NTE for the size of the town's population and it benefits from being the largest urban area in the region by pulling in patrons from other local areas. However, recent economic changes, both local and national, have affected the town and its day-time economy (DTE) causing knock-on effects to the NTE with most stakeholders reporting a downturn in numbers of patrons and profit. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Southville has suffered losses to a neighbouring English city and its larger NTE. [Figure 1](#) shows how the number of pubs in Southville peaked in the late 90's and has since seen a moderate decline due to these various factors
- Most stakeholders were in agreement that the size of the NTE in Southville was more than adequate. The local Licensing Board in particular saw 'overprovision' as being the main reason to deny any new applications for a licensed premises and local Town Centre Regeneration schemes did not see further NTE expansion as a desirable way to bring in money and improve the overall town's condition.

Police and the NTE

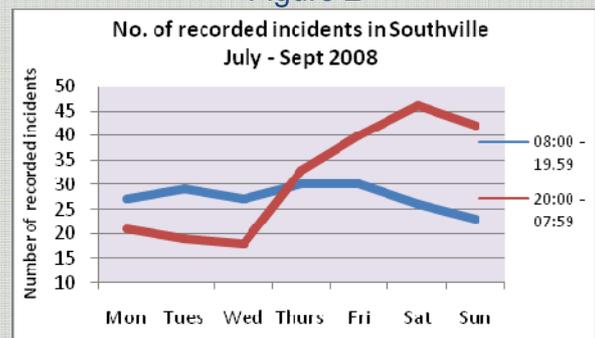
- In line with the rest of the UK, police statistics show how Southville experiences higher levels of disorder and crime at the weekend nights/early mornings. [Figure 2](#) shows how typically during the week from Monday to Thursday there are more recorded crimes during the day than at night, whereas Friday and Saturday nights/early mornings the numbers are reversed with a significant increase in recorded crime compared to the day. [Figure 3](#) demonstrates how on an average Saturday night/Sunday morning recorded crime peaks significantly in correspondence with the peak licensed trade hours and in particular the closing times of these venues.
- During these peaked times the nightshift should consist of an Inspector, a Sergeant and 8 officers who pair up and are assigned to patrol the north west, south east, or provide a 'floating car' which responds as and where needed. It was common practice that up to five officers from the backshift would stay on to assist the nightshift during these busy shifts.
- During peak NTE times maintaining a highly visible presence in the town centre was seen as being imperative at preventing and responding to disorder. A failure to maintain 'high vis' was perceived as potentially creating more problems. (see quote 1)
- Due to the pervasiveness of lower level disorder during certain times in the NTE officers have to use discretion and their own personal judgement as to what requires their attention and what can be overlooked or requires only a warning. Discretion levels varied considerably from officer to officer, and from shift to shift.

Figure 1



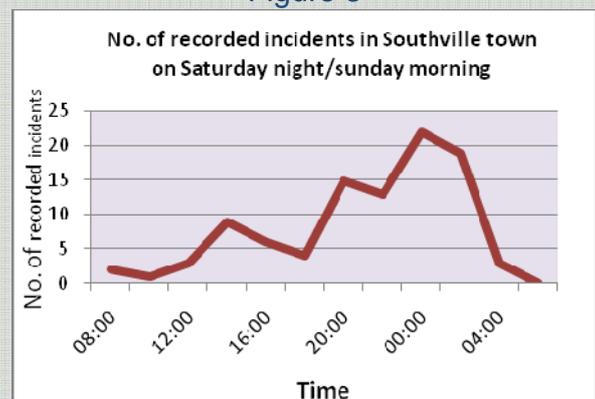
(NB Number of licensed premises taken from Yellow Pages. No data available for 00' and 02')

Figure 2



(NB figures taken from every 2nd week of each month, constituting 6 weeks of information in total and does not include FCC calls)

Figure 3



(NB figures taken from every 2nd week of each month, constituting 6 Saturdays worth of information in total and does not include FCC calls)

- Due to the high pressured working environment officers on shift together worked as a close-knit team. Safety of fellow officers was paramount. Some disparity does exist between shift-workers working the NTE and those officers who work '9 to 5'. Many officers on shifts believed the NTE had changed significantly since many '9 to 5' officers had been working it and were reliant on statistical information, such as number of arrests, for their information on the situation. (see quote 2)
- For a number of reasons officers were often abstracted from frontline duty, leaving shifts frequently short on numbers creating a reliance on cover from officers on backshift doing overtime or from Special Constables. Some officers believed that if numbers were too low it would become an influence on the effective execution of their role as guardians of public safety. Furthermore, if large incidents occurred requiring multiple officers, the shift quickly became stretched trying to respond to other incoming calls.

Policing a public 'under the influence'

- Officers strongly believed that over-consumption of alcohol was a key factor in the majority of problems they faced in the NTE, in particular the rising trend of 'front-loading' on alcohol purchased and consumed before entering the town centre. Officers perceived a greater risk factor when policing the NTE due to the unpredictable and often violent behaviour of intoxicated NTE patrons. (see quote 3)
- A rise in people being drunk and incapable (D&I's) has placed a significant responsibility on the police to ensure their health and well being when in custody.
- Officers perceived there to be an increase in sexually motivated crimes due to the increase in alcohol consumption and the diversifying of the NTE market from its traditionally male dominated past.
- Although Friday and Saturday nights were seen as being the most consistently busy nights, there was still a significant amount of unpredictability as to how busy nights would be. Furthermore, there were many occasions when random mid-week nights would unexpectedly be busy.

Security networks & responsible guardians

- CCTV is seen by police officers as being important to the effective running of a nightshift. Some concerns over CCTV, a bombardment of information to officers and the potential for an overreliance on technology, is seen to be strongly outweighed by the benefits of being able to prioritise calls allowing for effectively deploying police resources and the recording evidence.
- Special Constables are seen as being a crucial resource to augment both high visibility on the street and ability to react to calls in Southville.
- Domestic Noise Enforcement Teams have had a beneficial impact when they have accompanied shifts by reducing the burden of lower level 'nuisance calls', though for variety of reasons their presence with the shift was sporadic. Their powers to confiscate noise making equipment also drastically reduced the potential for reoffending throughout the night which would otherwise require several police visits.

Quote 1: *"It might be the case that not a lot of incidences are happening but I would suggest that that is largely owing to the heavy police presence and without that presence, and speaking from my own experience, if there is a serious incident away from the town centre we necessarily have to devote a lot of resources to, then the volume of calls in the town centre does rise and I can only put that down to the lack of police presence"* (Police officer)

Quote 2: *"[I think there is] a major gulf. I think if they were to come out and work the streets, as in how we have to work the streets they might have a more realistic idea rather than seeing the management reports and stats, working Monday to Friday, not seeing these people on the street, not seeing the aggression, not seeing the crimes that are committed, the abuse the officers have to put up and the aggression towards them and the lack of numbers and I think it would really open their eyes...I mean some of them haven't worked the streets for 15, 20 years"* (Police officer)

Quote 3: *"Sometimes it's like a war zone out there. Everyone is pushed, and I mean totally out of it, and you're looking at this situation with sober eyes and it's quite a sight, quite a sight indeed at times. In some ways its miracle that there are not more people that get seriously injured when you see what it's like at times"* (Police officer)

- Security Industry Authority (SIA) Licensing has had a significant influence on raising the quality of door stewards in the town and there now exists a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding of each other's role. (see quote 4)
- Bar/club licensee holders/managers run their premises with varying opinions on control and regulation, depending largely on the type of venue and clientele. Some venues prefer to self-regulate their relatively non-problematic private spaces, thereby having very low police assistance calls. Other venues collaborate fully with the police as well as self-regulate, but due to the clientele and general atmosphere of the venue they are more prone to experiencing disorder within their premises.
- A decision to restrict food outlet closing times to 1am is seen as having being a very positive move and has significantly reduced the number of people lingering about the town centre after pub/club closing time.
- During peak NTE times Southville is poorly endowed with public transport creating problems with congregating crowds trying to return home. One of the two main taxis ranks is seen by officers as a trouble 'black spot' due to its locality and lack of ordering system.
- Many different pieces of legislation and regulation have been implemented, both national and local, to help the police tackle the challenges they face during the NTE. The most successful have been those which have provided the police the means to respond to lower level crimes and disorder in a manner that is proportional to the crime (Fixed Penalty Notices and Antisocial Behaviour legislation) but importantly does not add paperwork or remove officers from frontline duty.
- Maintaining good working relationships with other local stakeholders and regulatory bodies was seen as being important to create a cooperative environment where all worked together to 'police' the NTE. Due to the high levels of crime and disorder taking place within the NTE and the limited number of actual police officers available to cover the whole town, officers saw this as an important way forward. (see quote 6)

FURTHER READING

Chatterton, P. Hollands, R (2003) 'Urban nightscapes; youth cultures, pleasure spaces and corporate power' Routledge

Hobbs D, Hadfield P, Lister S and Winlow S (2002). 'Door Lore': The Art and Economics of Intimidation. *British Journal of Criminology*, 42:352–370.

Hadfield, P (2006) *Bar Wars: Contesting the Night in Contemporary British Cities* Oxford University Press

Quote 4: "I have spoke to the police, who said that it is a lot better in Dumfries since we have taken over most of the pubs. We communicate with them more, even just when they drive past waving your hand, acknowledging them, instead of dropping your head. I think it has always been 'us and them' situation where it should be they are here to help you. You are getting hit on the front door you want them there as quickly as possible" (Head of security, Southville's largest club)

Quote 5: "FPN ticket, we feel we are doing something and we are getting them to pay attention to it...so they have been very good for us dealing with minor crimes, minor breaches, and I am no needing to worry about men having to sit down and do reports. We can put them in a cell for a few hours, let them sober up and then give them it in the morning and 99% are happy to get only that and are full of apologies" (Police officer)

Quote 6: "What we have got, we have got a council joint agency working group as a licensing forum, who meet a bimonthly forum, they are pretty good. From an operational perspective [we] speak to the council licensing board on a daily basis on a variety of things, I mean we work particularly well with the Licensing section" (Police officer)