

WORLD CAFE 19/06/2014

I. Thesis

Is it possible that BINs in the long-term increase citizens' distrust, and that it evolves into a 'snitch line'? Is the strengthening of social cohesion not compromised by this? How can we counter this possible side effect?

II. Discussions

Group 8

The information influx from citizens toward the police can always be bigger. Feedback to citizens is also important. Within a BIN, the goal is to take away the initial fears.

If the government imposes to create a BIN, then there is a risk that this leads to a snitch line. If the initiative comes from a citizen, the BIN will in general be more successful. Everyone, not only a BIN member, can call the police.

The word 'snitch line' is a description that is too negative for a BIN; it is some sort of myth. Besides this, it is a prejudice that is mainly used by critics of the BIN. Good communication about what a BIN is and what it is not, from the start of the BIN onwards, can prevent a BIN from becoming a snitch line. In practice, few cases are known of BINs that went too far.

Concerning social cohesion, it can be noted that in neighbourhoods where there was no social cohesion before, this will increase. Here, the person and especially the motivation of the coordinator and the mandated police officer play a crucial role.

The effect of a BIN cannot be measured. During a wave of burglaries, the willingness to report increases significantly.

Via social cohesion, inhabitants will be more alert, also for their neighbours who are travelling.

In The Netherlands there exists some kind of neighbourhood patrol wearing fluorescent jackets who greet visitors.

Group 7

"How can we keep people alert?" is a core question within crime prevention.

In the city of Ghent, papers are distributed wherein criminal facts are covered in detail. This increases the feeling of insecurity, because there is no preventive message present.

Within the BINs in the city of Geel, publications are distributed, such as 'holiday papers' (how can I safely go on holiday?).

The BINs are part of general prevention. There is especially a need of up-to-date information that is checked and sent by the police. For specific sectors such as hotels and pharmacies, BINs have already proven their usefulness.

Especially the preventive content of the BIN messages is very important. A BIN is not a snitch line. Here, there is a very clear difference in mentality between Belgians and Dutch.

Other groups than residents can also keep an eye on things to guarantee a safe neighbourhood. E.g., garbage collectors could also be used to report suspect behaviour.

In The Netherlands, there are Neighbourhood Prevention Teams (active throughout the province of Zeeland and the cities Roosendaal and Tilburg). These people walk around in their neighbourhood wearing fluorescent jackets, and they address people they do not know. In addition, the residents have marked their goods with Smartwater-DNA, and the police regularly controls the handling of stolen goods, to arrest possible offenders. Since the introduction of this system, not one burglary has happened in this neighbourhood. Every Neighbourhood Prevention Team also has its own Facebook page.

In the city of Geel, the BIN signs per neighbourhood will disappear. They will be replaced by large BIN signs on the access roads, alerting potential thieves in seven languages.

Group 6

There is enough control on the BIN to prevent it from becoming a snitch line. In most BINs, a coordinator who is not politically active is preferred, in order to avoid possible political recuperation. In a town where the extreme right tried to set up a BIN, many residents were no longer interested in participating. The neutrality of the BINs remains necessary.

This group also informs that social cohesion increases thanks to the BIN. For this reason, it is also important that the citizen takes the initiative, because otherwise, there will be no support within the neighbourhood.

The town of Blankenberge has to contend with an inverse burglary curve: little or no burglaries during winter and an increase during the summer months.

Many BINs are interested to work with social media.

Group 5

In The Netherlands, it is possible to signal crimes anonymously. Is it a problem that a crime is signalled when it concerns serious facts?

The city of Ghent has deliberately chosen not to set up a BIN. Within this zone, it is preferred to send more police on the streets.

The quality of the BIN depends on the coordinator and the mandated police officer. Messages should be useful and have a preventive content. The BIN offers the possibility to undertake something against criminality.

Social cohesion is present in many BINs, but it often depends on the BINs promoters. BINs that were started by a neighbourhood committee will organize neighbourhood parties and have a stronger social cohesion than BINs where residents are rather anonymous.

There is a need for harmonization between e.g. burglary prevention advice and BINs. At the start of the BIN, each BIN member could sign a document wherein he/she declares to agree receiving and applying burglary prevention advice. In addition, it would be interesting to provide a quality brand for home security, and to couple this to the BIN.

III. Conclusions

- Social cohesion increases within the BINs. In neighbourhoods where there was no social cohesion, this will increase anyway.
- The quality of a BIN's functioning depends upon the motivation of the mandated police officer and the coordinator.
- If the government imposes a BIN, the risk exists that this would lead to a snitch line.
- The fact that a BIN would be a snitch line is a myth and a prejudice that is mostly used by critics. Good communication from the start can prevent this from happening, so that no false expectations arise in the public.
- A higher willingness to report can be noted with BIN members.

IV. Action points

- Adjusting BIN and burglary prevention advice to each other, and making sure that there is a strong incentive to apply the advice (e.g. subsidies).
- Providing a quality brand for home security, and making sure that every new or renovated home reaches a minimum standard therein.



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