Editorial

At the start of the twenty-first century, safety has become one of the most important topics in the context of local social policy. Concern about increasing crime, insecurity and community safety has risen considerably over the past years. This issue of the European journal on Criminal Policy and Research discusses this development of the 'security issue' from various points of view. More specifically a growing convergence of the social institutions and the world of criminal justice can be observed. It is important to understand and analyse this development because it gives way to new directions in the social sphere, criminal justice and criminology.

Hans Boutellier discusses the shift from crime as a problem of the police and judicial authorities to a subject of local policy. In particular, he examines the relationship between safety policy and social policy and recent initiatives taken in the Netherlands, such as Justice in the Community (as a helping hand from the judicial authorities) and Communities that Care. On the basis of a concentric model he distinguishes the different groups and activities which need to be addressed in a broad approach to local safety. In his opinion the development of community justice can be judged as a valuable and promising response to the urgency surrounding the crime problem which is experienced in nowadays society.

Daniel Gilling examines the development of community safety in the UK, from the late 1980s through to the present and suggests that there has been a certain continuity, between the end of the 1980s and the present, in the socio-political impact of community safety. Just as it is erroneous to detach community safety from wider policy developments in criminal justice, so it is erroneous to detach it from wider developments in social policy. Community safety policy sometimes veers towards the exclusionary because it criminalises social policy. Limited international comparisons are enough to suggest that what is evidenced in the UK may have parallels in other advanced liberal states, despite differences in the political structures and cultures.

Loïc Wacquant points to the tremendous rise in prison populations in all advanced societies due to the increasingly frequent routine use of prison as an instrument for managing social insecurity. The situation in France is discussed as a counterweight to the American developments, although he discovers some worrying trends as well. The solution, according to Wacquant, on the criminal policy and practice front is to examine the proliferation of measures to 'widen' the penal net and, where possible, systematically propose a social, health or educational alternative.

Distributive justice concerns the dispensation of benefits and services to people, and the systems of taxation which make that possible. It lies at the core of most political values. In the literature on distributive justice there is not much to be found on the issues of crime and safety. Although there is little which speaks directly to the distribution of crime, there is much which can be used for that purpose. Ken Pease outlines the current distribution of crime opportunities, and concludes that their extreme inequality, and linkage with other social indices, suggests distributive unfairness. Some policy suggestions are set out which would have the effect of remedying such unfairness.

Evelyne Baillergeau and Christine Schaut go into the development of security policy in Belgium and the Netherlands on the basis of a larger study. They especially focus on the consequences for the work of social workers. The Belgian part of the article concentrates on the analysis of the practices and the tasks assigned to the social workers in working-class areas working within the framework of new measures for the fight against social exclusion and insecurity, in particular the security contract. The situation in the Netherlands is different from that in Belgium, also because of other political views and interactions. But there are also similarities. Apart from the political differences in the two countries, the new methodologies - thinking on social problems and carrying out actions in public - appear in both
countries to be identical. The new policies are applied at the neighbourhood level, on the basis that if the problems of insecurity occur at the local level, it is also there that the remedies must be carried out.

Starting from research that focuses on the interagency relationships within community crime prevention, Peter Goris offers a model that creates some possibilities for creating a safer community on the one hand and that holds back the dynamics of social exclusion on the other. He thereby focuses on the relations between (community oriented) welfare agencies on the one hand and police agencies on the other hand. On the basis of empirical research he points out the relevance of analysis and evaluation of the co-operation, starting from two different perspectives - the consensus model and the conflict model.

In the Current Issues section, Angela Grier and Terry Thomas discuss the UK’s Criminal Record Bureau. It can be seen as a new agency for administering a new social policy which will increase the number of people subject to pre-employment screening by means of a check on their criminal record.