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ALEX HIRSCHFIELD

REDUCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BURGLARY:  
THE IMPACT OF ALLEY GATES

*Abstract:* A new situational crime prevention measure recently introduced into Great Britain involves the fitting of gates to alleyways running along the back of terraced properties to block off access to motivated offenders and prevent them from committing burglary. The City of Liverpool has installed over 3,000 gates over six years protecting more than 45% of the city's housing stock. Results from a recent evaluation revealed that the schemes not only resulted in significant reductions in burglary but also saw falls in the fear of crime compared with comparable non-gated areas.

*Key Words:* Burglary; Situational Crime Prevention; Alley-gates.

*Introduction*

Research has shown that the majority of burglaries to terraced houses are committed by offenders breaking into the rear of properties. Alley-gating is a method of reducing crime by installing gates at the end of alleyways running behind houses. This restricts access for potential offenders. Over 3,000 gates have been installed in the City of Liverpool in NW England. In 2002 an evaluation of Liverpool's alley gating scheme was carried out.

*The evaluation*

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

- Did alley-gating reduce crime?
- Did some schemes perform better than others, and if so why?
- Did alley-gating have a positive or negative effect in the areas surrounding the gated blocks?
- Did the alley-gating schemes have wider impacts, for example on fear of crime, health, community cohesion and quality of life?
- What effect did the gates have on environmental quality?

The research has utilised a range of data sources including:

- Police recorded burglary data for individual residential properties.
- Detailed information about the gates e.g. location, cost of gates, date of installation.
- In-depth resident surveys in the scheme areas and a control area, conducted prior to and post the installation of gates.
  - The evaluation has utilised a range of methods to assess the impact of alleygating, this multi method approach provides more robust findings, and helps to provide explanations for change.
  - Burglary rates were compared before and after the implementation of gates. Importantly, changes in the gated areas were compared with a comparison area. This ensured that observed changes were not simply a reflection of wider trends or random fluctuations. Statistical regression models were used to confirm whether the identified relationships were reliable.
- The “dosage” and timing of interventions was compared with the level of change in crime. This tested the assumption that as the number of alley-gates fitted increased there would be a proportionate reduction in crime.
- Geographical analysis was used to examine displacement or diffusion of benefit in three areas over time; an action area, a control area and a buffer area. Figure 1 shows the buffer zones that were created to look for evidence of geographical displacement. Seven buffer zones were created as a series of 200 metre concentric rings around each scheme.
- Individual schemes were compared by correlating their outcomes with variables including the number of properties protected by gates, the number of gates used, the pre-existing rate of crime and socio-demographic variables. This helped to identify factors associated with success.

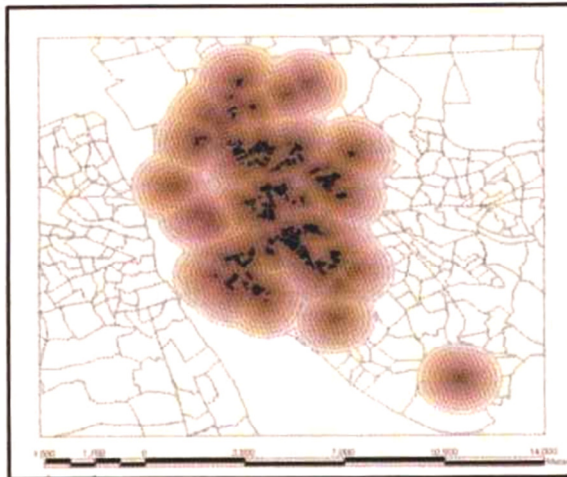


Figura 1 - Aree provviste di cancelli nei vicoli e Zone Tampone  
Figure 1 - Alley-gated Areas and Buffer Zones



- Resident perceptions were explored with a pre- and post-implementation survey conducted with a random sample of respondents in the alleygating areas and comparison area. Topics covered included perceptions of safety, perceptions of disorder, satisfaction with the area, community participation, health and quality of life. The survey was repeated before and after the installation of gates.

### *Results*

- Areas receiving alley-gating showed a significant reduction in burglary of 33% relative to a control area.
- This reduction increased the longer the gates were in place indicating that alley-gates become more effective at reducing burglary as they become established.
- The link between the implementation of alley-gating measures and burglary reduction was statistically significant, increasing the likelihood that the measures taken were responsible for the observed reduction
- Crime also fell in the areas not subjected to the intervention. This was a diffusion of benefit as a result of the measures taken. Offenders appeared to particularly avoid areas close by (within two hundred metres) of the boundary of alley-gated areas.
- Residents' perceptions of safety and satisfaction with their area significantly increased following installation of the alley-gates. This did not happen in the non gated control area.
- Residents' experiences of incidents of disorder decreased following installation of the alley-gates



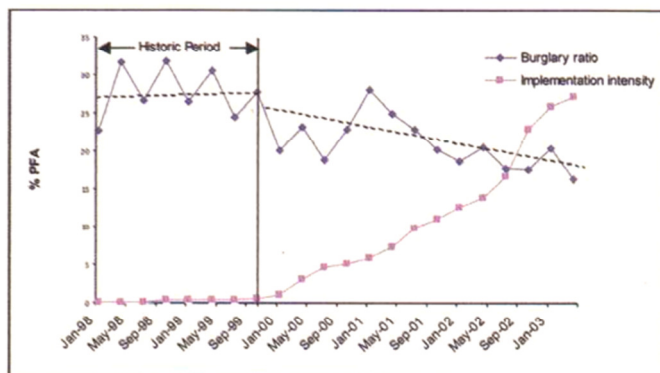


Figura 2 - Riduzione del crimine e intensità dell'adempimento

Figure 2 - Crime reduction and implementation intensity

### Conclusion

This research has produced strong evidence to support the use of alleygating as an effective crime prevention tactic. The research has identified that alley-gating has the potential to secure wider benefits including improving the aesthetic appearance of an area, and reducing levels of worry and fear about crime and anti-social behaviour.

Further research is needed to ascertain how far these benefits extend into the future. Although early indications are very positive, experience of burglary reduction initiatives involving the target hardening of individual properties suggest that the success of schemes is dependent upon residents' full compliance of the measures being implemented. For example, if gates left open and residents lose their keys and if young people are insufficiently supervised and begin to vandalise the equipment effectiveness of this crime prevention measure will be short lived.

In conclusion, alley-gating is undoubtedly a good example of an effective neighbourhood crime prevention strategy and it worked well in Liverpool. However, for it to be as successful elsewhere it is essential the implementation of the programme is handled properly and that local residents are fully involved as partners.

ALEX HIRSCHFIELD, *He directs the Applied Criminology Centre at the University of Huddersfield, UK. He is an inter-disciplinary criminologist. He makes studies on several*

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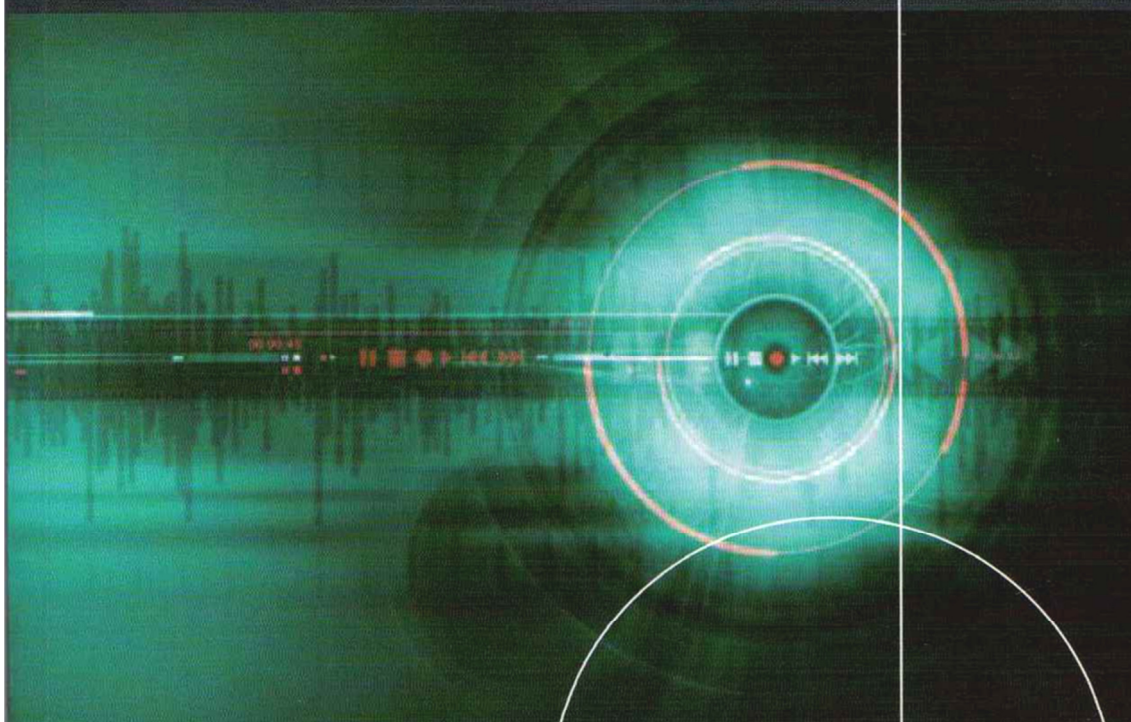
*topics, such as environmental criminology, situational and technological approaches to crime reduction, violence and the night time economy, crime mapping, geographical information systems (GIS) and links between crime, disadvantage and health. He has undertaken several researches. He has directed several major policy evaluation exercises including the Reducing Burglary Initiative (Home Office), New Deal for Communities Crime Theme (ODPM) and the impact of changes to the Licensing Act (24 Hours drinking on alcohol-related crime – Home Office). He is currently directing two counter-terrorism projects, an evaluation of social interventions aimed at Preventing Violent Extremism and the development of web-based toolkits for security managers responsible for protecting critical national infrastructure.*



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