

Factsheet #3

Using research to inform urban security strategies



Generating Insights

Urban security strategies have evolved considerably over the past 30 years, with a wealth of knowledge generated and lessons learnt from research and practice. We now know significantly more about appropriate processes and models of problem identification, problem solving, co-design, partnership working and implementation that have provided valuable insights to advance urban security policies and interventions.

Research can provide valuable insights and useful learning. Practitioners can draw on mechanisms and types of interventions that have been demonstrated to generate positive outcomes. However, care needs to be taken in transferring these to different contexts and places. Methods of problem-solving that tailor responses to the context of local problems and populations through processes of assessment and analysis are more effective than 'off the shelf' universal solutions.



Collaboration and Mutual Understanding

Consideration needs to be given to the different timeframes that key stakeholders operate within, notably politicians, practitioners and researchers. For practice to benefit from insights gained from evaluation and research, a 'rapprochement' of these different temporal realities needs to occur. Different organisational timeframes need to be considered and incorporated into the implementation process. Closer collaboration between research and practice, underpinned by sustainable funding and supported by long-term organisational commitments will support a more holistic and evidence-based approach to urban security. **Working together from the outset through to evaluation will benefit all involved.** Formative evaluations done in collaboration with practitioners can be helpful to contextualise, identifying both successful elements in the implementation process, as well as highlighting aspects that need to be adapted or changed in future practice.



The Importance of Evaluation

Evaluation is important for **development** to help strengthen institutions, for **knowledge** to provide a deeper understanding of specific questions or fields and for **accountability** to measure the outcomes and their effectiveness and efficiency.

The last 30 years has seen an increasing appreciation of the need for rigorous evaluation of interventions as a mechanism of accountability, to help strengthen institutional development and to inform accumulated knowledge and evidence.



Context Matters

Moving beyond simply asking 'what works' with its focus on outcome effects, actually investigating **why** particular interventions work, **for whom** and **under what circumstances**, has shifted the focus onto **how interventions are implemented**, and the contextual factors underpinning them. All evaluations produce knowledge of what worked (in the past) for a particular population, under specific circumstances, at a particular time. This may or may not hold for future populations at different times and in distinct places. The inferences that can be drawn are contingent. Evaluations should always be assessed against the context in which they are conducted, only then can meaningful lessons be learnt, and potentially transferred to other locations. These processes of adaptation should themselves be assessed.

"Intelligent replication requires a process that customises action to problem and context. In this respect, replication will always involve some degree of innovation, trial, feedback and adjustment, whether minor or major."

Paul Ekblom,
University of the Arts London



Disseminate Findings

All evaluation findings, good or bad, should be disseminated to broaden the evidence base, ultimately working towards supporting the individuals and communities affected. Not sharing evaluations hinders progressing the accumulated knowledge base.

"The world is full of libraries full of good practices about crime prevention, urban safety and urban security but mostly nobody actually gets to test them properly because they require integrated solutions and they require collaboration."

Barbara Holtmann,
IcARUS Expert Advisory Board

The Importance of Data

In order to evaluate we need good quality data. All stakeholders, be they regional or local authorities, or practitioners, need to be aware of the importance of evaluation, and supported in their efforts to incorporate key indicators and outcome measures facilitating evaluation of programmes and interventions. In order to do this, data sharing agreements between agencies need to be created and honoured.

"If you take the view that you're trying to prevent crime on a problem-solving basis, then you need to be very clear on what the problem is, and that means you need data."

Gloria Laycock,
University College London

Urban security demands different data than crime data alone and necessitates thinking differently about – and differently measuring – indicators of 'success' and outcomes in the evaluation of interventions. Factors such as levels of perceived insecurity, trust in authority, community well-being and victim support are salient outcomes in urban security. While safety evaluations and assessments are growing in popularity, they often exclude certain segments of the population. Only inclusive and representative data will paint an accurate picture without stigmatising particular groups or neighbourhoods, capable of informing interventions on the ground. Victimisation surveys have grown in importance as an alternative (and often more robust) source of information about the nature and extent of crime and harm, which disrupts the erstwhile monopoly of the police as gatekeepers of crime data.



Key Takeaway



IcARUS is a 4-year project funded under the European Union's H2020 programme.



The IcARUS project (Innovative Approaches to Urban Security) aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and Cross-analysis of urban security.