

Summaries

Living under pressure. Public behavior in Hong Kong

by Lodewijk Brunt

In many circles it has become an accepted wisdom that a high population pressure leads to serious behavioral disturbances. This viewpoint is based on several widely published experiments with animals, especially rats. It appeared that a kind of 'behavioral sink' occurred when the number of rats kept increasing in the same amount of space, even when other circumstances – like the amount of food and drink – were favourable. Aggression mounted, reproduction came to a halt, homosexuality became widespread and newborn members were slaughtered.

Some scholars have tried to apply this insight to human societies, especially big cities. The enormous rise in urban crime, violence, and vandalism that took place since the sixties and seventies has been explained by referring to the increasing amount of people, population density and lack of privacy. In this article this line of thought is considered with reference to a special case study: the city state of Hong Kong. In this city some of the greatest population densities in the world are to be found, in some parts well over 100.000 people per square kilometer. How do people behave in public? What about the behavioral sink that could be expected on the basis of such a condition?

It appears that Hong Kong is a fairly safe city, with a relatively low level of typical urban streetcrime and a low rate of violence. How could this be explained? In this article two kinds of codes are distinguished, of a cultural nature and of an organizational nature. In Chinese culture there seems to exist a remarkable tolerance towards all kinds of consequences of extreme population pressure, i.e. noise, lack of privacy, and lack of space. Moreover, Hong Kong is characterized as an 'incessant organization', in which multifunctionality is an important trait. In combination these codes are conducive to a remarkable order beneath the seeming chaos a metropolis is constantly producing.

'That is the prey.' On foreign tourists as victims of muggings in Amsterdam

by Gert Vogel

This paper gives a detailed understanding of an under-researched practice occurring in one of Europe's tourist sites: mugging in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. After sketching the context, the focus is narrowed to tourists as victims of muggings in inner city Amsterdam. Drawing on official figures of reported muggings to the police, victim surveys, and material gathered from individual interviews with muggers, the author argues that foreign tourists in the inner city of Amsterdam are attractive potential victims from the perspective of motivated and experienced muggers. This selection of foreign tourists as victims by muggers does not

seem to be motivated by resentment, anger, or frustration against the tourist industry as a whole, or against tourists as individuals. On the contrary, motivated muggers seem to love tourists.

Life-style similarity, neighborhood relations and social well-being. A rational-choice approach

by H. de Vos and H. Knol

In this article we develop and test a theoretical model about the neighborhood as a part of people's social environment with which they produce social well-being. Social well-being is positively defined in terms of social support and social affiliation and negatively in terms of social threat and disaffiliation. On the basis of the model we predict: (1) that people whose life-style is more similar to the life-styles of their co-residents produce more social well-being in their neighborhood, (2) that this relation can be ascribed to the fact that a more similar life-style diminishes the production costs of social well-being. The model was tested in an urban neighborhood and the results were in accordance with both predictions. An alternative explanation, based on an hypothesized relation between life-style similarity and degree of disturbance could be rejected. Also we could show that the relation between life-style similarity and social well-being can be ascribed for the greater part to employed residents and students. The relation disappears for residents who are unemployed, on the dole, retired, or keeping the house. This finding was predicted by the theoretical model.