

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH ASSOCIATION

The first thing to understand is that the peace of the city, the streets and sidewalks, is not kept primarily by the police, even though the police are required; it is maintained primarily by an intricate and almost unconscious network of voluntary control exercised by the people themselves.

Jane Jacobs

What is the Neighbourhood Watch?

The Neighborhood Watch was founded in the USA in the 60s and 70s and it arrived in Europe through Britain, in 1982. There are about 10 million households that have so far joined this project.

The program provides for the self-organization among neighbours to check the area around their homes. The activity of the Neighbourhood Watch groups is marked by warning signs that are meant to communicate to anyone walking in the area concerned, that his/her presence will not go unnoticed and that the neighbourhood is careful and aware of what is happening inside the area.

Where the program is active, “the eyes” of the residents on public and private spaces are a deterrent against burglaries and a disincentive to illegal behavior (graffiti, muggings, fraud, vandalism, etc.). The program includes, in addition to the monitoring of the area, the identification of environmental and behavioral vulnerabilities that are always opportunities for authors of burglaries in homes. The collaboration and trust among neighbours are fundamental because they establish an atmosphere of security that will be perceived by all residents (even those who do not participate in the program), and especially by the most vulnerable such as the elderly and children.

The sense of closeness, coupled with the certainty that our neighbours will not stay locked in the house in front of an emergency, conveys a strong sense of belonging and security, and strengthens the bonds between the members of the community. Even the police are entitled to the results of this program. An ongoing dialogue between law enforcement and sensitive residents produces a better quality of reporting by the latter.

Situational prevention and routine activity theory. The Situational Prevention is a set of strategies of prevention which has its basis in scientific Theories of Opportunity, the routine activity and the rational choice. Its purpose is to take measures to reduce the chance of the event criminal. Therefore it is more effective the more specific is the crime of which you want to intervene and the more accurate knowledge of the situation we have.

The Situational Prevention focuses on:

- the opportunity that makes the offense possible
- the preconditions of the event, rather than the offenders
- the prevention of the event, rather than the discovery and punishment of the guilty.

The Routine Activity Theory, developed by Cohen and Felson, is one of the main theories that refer to environmental criminology, that is a criminological approach that focuses on the space and the conditions in which a criminal event takes place.

According to this theory, so as to fulfill a predatory crime, three things must happen at the same time and in the same place:

- the availability of a suitable target
- the absence of a controller suitable to prevent the criminal event
- the presence of a potential attacker

The Neighbourhood Watch acts on the absence of a capable controller, giving residents the ability to control their territory, and on the available target by reducing the opportunities for thieves and reinforcing goals through the identification of environmental and behavioral vulnerabilities and the creation of targeted prevention measures.