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Public perceptions of private security in shopping malls: A comparison of the United Kingdom and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides one of the first comparative empirical studies of private policing in equivalent shopping malls in the UK and Korea. The paper is based upon 200 interviews with customers who visited the malls, 200 h observation and 39 interviews with security officers and other stakeholders. The paper builds upon the traditional orientations of security officers as either 'watchmen' or 'parapolice' to offer a third 'servicemen' orientation. The paper also illustrates a variety of other differences in roles and shows the generally positive views of the public towards private security.

1. Introduction

This study is empirical comparative research on public perceptions of private security in shopping malls in two different countries: South Korea (hereafter Korea) and the United Kingdom. The private security industry has increased in role and size in many countries in recent decades and the UK and South Korea are no exception (Wakefield, 2003; Button et al., 2006; Button and Park, 2009). The reasons for the growth have been well documented in research, such as the growth of mass private property, increased crime and fear of crime, increasing terrorist risks and the inability of the state to meet all security demands, to name some (Shearing et al., 1981; Sarre and Prenzler, 2011; Jones and Newburn, 1998). Private security has filled the gap in a variety of locations and one area where private security has become very prominent, is, as the principal agents of policing in shopping malls, which are usually areas of hybrid or quasi-public space (private space which is freely open to the public) (Shearing and Stenning, 1985; Jones and Newburn, 1998; Button, 2007a). Empirical studies of private security in shopping malls have been relatively sparse and largely concentrated on the English speaking world (Wakefield, 2003; Joh, 2004; Button, 2007a; Manzo, 2004, 2006 and 2010; Sarre and Prenzler, 2011). Comparative studies of private security are even rarer, with most focusing upon regulatory systems, country profiles or surveys (de Waard, 1993; Button, 2007b; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Nalla et al., 2009). Empirical research on security officers in Korea are also rare (Nalla and Hwang, 2006; Button and Park, 2009; Nalla et al., 2009).

This paper offers a unique contribution to the very small number of studies that have conducted either comparative or empirical studies of private security, undertaking both and using both quantitative and qualitative data derived from interviews and observation. It offers an important contribution to knowledge on the orientation and culture of security officers which has been the subject of only a handful of studies, largely in English speaking countries. This paper will begin by briefly exploring the relevant literature on private security in the context of this paper. It will then set out the methods used for gathering data for this paper. The paper will then move on to explore the security officers at the two case study sites, examining their use of legal tools, their orientation and the public perceptions of them. In doing this the paper will propose an additional orientation of security specific to Korea, and

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possibly other Far Eastern countries termed the 'servicemen', which is distinct from the more well established orientations often used of 'watchmen' and 'parapolice'. The paper will then end with a discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature review

There have been studies of the private security in shopping malls in the UK (Wakefield, 2003; Button, 2007a), Australia (Sarre and Prenzler, 2011), Netherlands (van Stedan, 2007), Canada (Manzo, 2006, 2010), USA (Joh, 2004), but no such research in Korea. There is a wider base of research centring around perception of the public, police and private security officers of one another usually based upon survey research (Shearing and Stenning, 1983; Shearing et al., 1985a and b; Nalla and Hummer, 1999; Noaks, 2000; Crawford and Lister, 2005; Nalla and Hwang, 2006; Manzo, 2004, 2006 and 2010; van Steden and Nalla, 2010; da Silva Lopes, in press). There has also been virtually no comparative research relating to private security, with the small base that has largely comparing regulatory systems or other macro issues (de Waard, 1993, Button, 2007b; Jones and Newburn, 2006). The importance of comparative research has been emphasised with the increasing interrelationship between different countries because of many benefits doing it (Pakes, 2010; Diez-Repolles, 2013). Comparative research can provide a deeper and better understanding of the differences in the private security industry between countries. This paper will start to fill that gap by offering insights on public perceptions of private security at two comparable malls.

The private security industry has expanded massively in size and role in most industrialised countries. To illustrate this, the two countries are compared below (although one must take such statistics with caution, particularly in relation to private security because of high labour turnover, part-time workers etc van Steden and Sarre, 2007):

- In the UK there are 339,440 security officers which compares to 160,566 police officers (Button and Stierstedt, in press).
- In South Korea there are 153,767 security officers which compares to 113,077 police officers (KNPA, 2017).

Alongside the expansion of private security industry, there have been significant changes in the roles and status of the private security officers. Traditionally, security officers have been hired as static security guards in building, facilities or apartments. However, the range of functions undertaken by officers has become wider (Jones and Newburn, 1998; Wakefield, 2003; Crawford and Lister, 2005; Button, 2007a). Research on security in shopping malls has also illustrated their positive roles in enhancing safety as well as dealing with often dangerous incidents, such as arresting shoplifters and breaking up fights (Wakefield, 2003; Button, 2007a).

The public perception of private security is also a mixed and contested issue. There is clearly a body of research which suggests the negative and poor quality image of the sector (Livingstone and Hart, 2003; Hansen Löfstrand et al., 2016). Moreover, some consider that security officers have an image of shady 'watchmen' and even 'corrupt gangsters or hired guns (van Steden and Nalla, 2010, p217). However, there is only a limited research regarding the perception of the public on private security officer and no such comparative research in shopping malls, to contrast with police studies. The few studies that have been conducted were of citizens in general and not for particular customers (Shearing and Stenning, 1985; Nalla and Heraux, 2003; van Steden and Nalla, 2010). There is also a body of research on particular nodes or locations which demonstrates a much more positive contribution of private security (Noaks, 2000; Sharp and Wilson, 2000; Wakefield, 2003; Crawford and Lister, 2005). Therefore, this study will reveal the public perception of private security and do so using a comparative approach.

3. Methodology

This paper is based upon a broader project which sought to compare private security in two comparative locations in the UK and Korea using comparative case studies. Such research is rare and poses significant challenges, with most of the research beyond policy focusing upon surveys, which aside from translation issues presents fewer challenges (Nalla et al., 2009). The design of the study therefore required innovative methods to be developed and compromises to traditional means of researching such social objects. The lessons and challenges of which, will form a future paper from this study. The comparison of two shopping malls in one country would pose challenges, across two very different countries these were to be even greater. Nevertheless as Lijphart (1971) has argued comparative research based upon case studies can generate a variety of positive contributions from hypothesis testing to theory infirming, even if generalizable findings and hypothesis testing are more difficult.

Korea and the UK are significantly different countries: the UK is an Anglo-Saxon and European country with a distinct culture and a long established democratic state based upon based on the constitutional monarchy. By contrast South Korea is a Republic with a relatively new democratic system with an Asian culture. The UK was the first country to industrialise, South Korea has largely done so in the last 50 years. However, given the dominance of the Western literature on private security and the lack of research on South Korea and the fact the principal author is Korean it seemed natural to compare South Korea to a western country like the UK. This would enable the researcher to compare the UK findings against previous research from this country, to determine if they were representative. It would also then enable the first Korean research to be benchmarked against the UK to determine the similarities and differences.

The research is based upon two shopping malls: one in the UK (South Mall), one in Korea (Mega Mall). Table 1 identifies the main characteristics of the two malls. There were many similarities: large shopping area with similar profile of retail outlets, restaurants; the number of security officers; other entertainment such as a cinema being present to name some. There were differences, however, in that Mega Mall was around three times bigger in square feet and had double the number of stores. These size differences were not significant in terms of this study as the more important issues were the size of security force and the environment they worked in,

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