Flip the Streets Community Enacted Public Criminology and the Reclamation of Public Space[1]

Structured Abstract

Purpose

This paper introduces *community enacted public criminology* as an extension to existing models of public criminology. It does so through the Flip the Streets (FLP) initiative, a participatory, arts-based response to hate graffiti that embeds criminological learning and action within communities. The paper argues that co-produced, place-based interventions constitute a necessary fourth strand of public criminology, capable of addressing the everyday harms of exclusion, fear and 'ambient hate.'

Design/methodology/approach

Six participatory action research interventions were delivered across Swansea (2022–2024) with 140 participants (105 children and young people; 35 university students), using facilitated dialogue, criminological framing, co-produced mural design, and public installation. Qualitative data (fieldnotes, observations, informal interviews and community feedback) were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach.

Findings

Visible, creative interventions reduced fear and insecurity, strengthened belonging, and generated intergenerational and institutional trust. Young people, often stigmatised in public-safety narratives, became active agents of prevention and cohesion. The analysis demonstrates how criminological concepts (e.g., harm, stigma, desistance) can be operationalised in everyday spaces to support community-led safety.

Originality/value

The paper advances a new *fourth strand* of public criminology, *community enacted public criminology*, in which criminological knowledge is co-produced *with* communities through participatory, arts-based practice. The FLP model offers a scalable, evidence-informed framework aligned with the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and Safer Streets priorities, providing practical guidance for local authorities and community-safety partnerships.

Keywords: public criminology; community safety; hate crime; participatory action research; community cohesion; creative methods.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, public criminology has become a central concern in debates about the discipline's civic purpose and public value. While definitions vary, public criminology broadly seeks to extend criminological knowledge beyond academic boundaries into public debate, community practice, and policy contexts so that it can contribute to justice, accountability, and the reduction of harm (Loader and Sparks, 2011). Turner (2013) conceptualises its power in terms of two functions: its ability to "fight for truth" by exposing social harms and inequalities, and its potential to "make criminology newsworthy" by engaging wider publics in dialogue about crime and justice. Together, these aims underscore a disciplinary commitment to relevance and democratic engagement.

Yet, as several scholars have noted (Burawoy, 2008; Henne and Shah, 2020), the reach of public criminology remains uneven and its publics partial. Much of its established activity: university teaching, media commentary, practitioner engagement, policy influence, still takes place within institutional spaces or elite networks. These forms of engagement tend to interact with audiences already familiar with criminology: students, policymakers, professionals, or concerned citizens. As a result, those most directly affected by social harm and insecurity, minoritised communities, young people, residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, are often positioned as objects of criminological analysis rather than participants in criminological dialogue.

This limitation has created a conceptual and practical gap in the model. Existing strands of public criminology do not fully account for the forms of everyday, place-based harm that shape people's sense of belonging, inclusion, and safety. Nor do they provide mechanisms through which communities can directly shape criminological practice themselves. There is therefore a need to expand public criminology by recognising forms of engagement that are co-produced with communities and enacted within local, lived environments.

Hate crime offers a critical lens through which to consider this challenge. Defined by Perry (2001) as a mechanism through which power and prejudice are expressed and enforced, hate crime has profound impacts on feelings of safety, social trust, and collective identity. Hate graffiti represents a highly visible but under-examined form of symbolic harm. Its presence in public space contributes to what Wilson (2014) terms "ambient hate": the everyday normalisation of hostility, exclusion, and fear. Despite its psychological and social consequences, policy responses have largely focused on rapid removal rather than community engagement or deeper social repair.

While many incidents addressed through Flip the Streets involved explicitly racist language or symbols, the project adopts the broader term "hate graffiti" to reflect the wider criminological and policy category of hate crime. This encompasses hostility motivated not only by race, but also religion, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and

other protected or marginalised identities (Perry, 2001; Schweppe, 2021). The use of the broader term is therefore intentional. First, it reflects the empirical reality that hateful visuals often intersect across multiple axes of exclusion—for example combining racist and xenophobic messaging, or misogynistic and homophobic symbolism. Second, it aligns with the project's preventative and community-safety orientation, which focuses on the social harms produced by symbolic exclusion regardless of whether they meet formal criminal thresholds. Third, it enables analysis of hate graffiti as a wider mechanism of boundary-making and social exclusion, rather than limiting interpretation solely to racism. However, racism remained a central empirical concern, particularly given the project's alignment with the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. In this sense, "hate graffiti" functions as an analytically inclusive category within which racist graffiti represents a significant and recurring subtype.

This paper addresses these gaps by introducing the concept of community enacted public criminology, a proposed *fourth strand* of public criminology that positions communities not merely as recipients of criminological knowledge but as co-producers of criminological insight and action. Rooted in participatory, creative, and place-based practices, this strand emphasises the co-creation of safety through collective analysis, dialogue, and visible transformation of public space.

The argument is developed through the Flip the Streets (FLP) initiative, a collaborative intervention delivered across Swansea in response to hate graffiti. Through facilitated dialogue, criminological framing, and co-produced public art, participants engaged directly with the meanings and impacts of hate in their communities, transforming sites of hostility into symbols of inclusion and collective efficacy. The paper draws on data from six interventions (2022–2024) to examine how FLP operationalises community enacted public criminology, and how visible, participatory responses to hate graffiti can reduce fear, strengthen belonging, and build multi-agency partnerships.

In doing so, the paper contributes: (1) a conceptual extension of public criminology; (2) an empirical exploration of participatory, arts-based interventions in community safety; and (3) practical guidance for local authorities and practitioners seeking community-led approaches to hate prevention and cohesion.

Literature Review

Public Criminology: Scope, Promise and Limitations

Public criminology has become a defining conversation within the discipline over the past two decades, reflecting concern with criminology's social purpose and civic relevance. Loader and Sparks (2011) famously framed public criminology as the effort to bring criminological knowledge into democratic debate—whether through pedagogy, outreach, or policy engagement. These three strands have been widely taken up:

1. Educative public criminology, expanding criminology beyond the university classroom.
2. Engaged or civic criminology, including media commentary, public events, and adult learning.
3. Policy-oriented or activist criminology, through which scholars challenge, critique, or collaborate with state institutions.

Together, these strands have shaped criminology's public identity and contributed to debates on justice, policing, punishment, and social harm. Yet while influential, critics argue that public criminology has not fully realised its transformative potential. Turner (2013) contends that public criminology oscillates between fighting for truth, making harms visible and competing for newsworthiness, without fundamentally shifting the power relations that shape harm. Others highlight the narrowness of its public reach. Much public criminology continues to engage audiences already familiar with criminological discourse: students, researchers, policymakers, or civically engaged citizens (Perry, 2001; Bell & Perry, 2015). Marginalised communities, those most affected by crime, insecurity, and symbolic violence, remain least likely to shape criminological conversations (Paterson, Brown & Walters, 2019).

This raises a persistent question: for whom, and with whom, is public criminology "public"?

The Need for an Extension to Public Criminology

Several scholars argue that public criminology has yet to address its own structural inequalities. Henne and Shah (2020) call for a justice-oriented public criminology that centres lived experience and challenges epistemic hierarchies. Belknap (2015) similarly advocates feminist, activist approaches that place community voices and community harms at the centre of criminological inquiry. These critiques converge on a shared concern: existing strands of public criminology remain too unidirectional, insufficiently participatory, and too detached from the daily realities of exclusion, fear, and belonging experienced by many communities.

Turner (2013) argues that public criminology's missing potential lies in its *praxis*: the capacity to bridge understanding and action. For Turner, public criminology must move "beyond commentary" to become a participatory civic practice capable of enabling change. This is echoed by Jones, Sagar and Forde (2023), whose work demonstrates how co-produced criminological engagement can alter institutional responses to stigma. Yet even these examples remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Taken together, the literature suggests the need for an extended conceptualisation:

- public criminology that is co-created rather than communicated,

- enacted in place rather than disseminated from the academy, and
- embedded in everyday community practices rather than episodic public interventions.

This conceptual gap provides the platform for the development of community enacted public criminology, which this paper advances.

Hate, Symbolic Violence, and the Importance of Everyday Space

The need for such an extension is especially acute in the context of hate crime. Hate crime operates not merely as an offence but, following Perry (2001), as a "mechanism of power and oppression" that reasserts social hierarchies. Hate is experienced in daily, mundane forms, not only through direct victimisation but also through what Wilson (2014) terms ambient hate: the normalisation of exclusionary messages embedded in public space.

Hate graffiti is one such message. While often dismissed as antisocial behaviour, hate visuals, involving slurs, extremist symbols, misogynistic imagery or racialised messages, constitute a form of symbolic violence (Perry, 2014). Research finds that visible disorder amplifies fear (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), reduces public confidence, restricts mobility, and undermines feelings of safety (Squires, 2008; Taylor, Cordin & Njiru, 2010). Yet hate graffiti has been largely overlooked in both criminology and policy, where removal is treated as an environmental task rather than a social intervention.

This neglect matters. Hate visuals shape neighbourhood narratives, influencing who feels welcome, who feels threatened, and who claims ownership of space. Their presence can be especially harmful in communities already experiencing deprivation, polarisation, or mistrust.

Community Responses to Hate: Limits and Untapped Potential

Policy responses to hate graffiti have traditionally emphasised rapid removal, enforcement, or public-order management (Halsey & Young, 2002). While important, such approaches overlook the potential of community-led, expressive responses that foster resilience, cohesion, and agency. Emerging literature on community arts and visual criminology suggests that creative methods offer alternative avenues for expressing harm, reclaiming space, and producing shared narratives (Carrabine, 2012; Mannay, 2016; Fraser & Matthews, 2021).

Despite this, criminology has seldom positioned communities as *producers* of safety interventions. Local responses to hate are often consultative rather than co-creative, and communities, particularly young people, are framed as recipients of safety strategies rather than active agents in shaping them.

This indicates a theoretical and practical gap: where are the forms of public criminology that enable communities to respond to hate, reclaim ownership of public space, and co-produce safety?

It is this gap that the Flip the Streets (FLP) initiative was designed to explore, through a participatory, arts-based model that explicitly embeds criminological reflection within community-led practice. The project's participatory, creative, and place-based approach operationalises many of the aspirations articulated in the literature but rarely enacted in practice.

This provides the conceptual foundation for community enacted public criminology, proposed in this paper as a fourth strand of public criminology: a model in which criminological knowledge and community action are co-created, visible, embodied, and transformative.

Having established the need for a participatory, place-based extension of public criminology, the next section outlines the methodological framework through which FLP operationalised this model in practice.

Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

The FLP initiative was designed as a community-based response to hate graffiti and its wider impact on community safety and cohesion. The project adopted a participatory action research (PAR) framework underpinned by community-engaged learning principles. PAR was selected because it centres collective inquiry and action, valuing lived experience as a form of knowledge and prioritising social transformation (Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995).

In criminology, participatory approaches remain relatively underused but have growing traction as part of the move toward public criminology (Henne and Shah, 2020). They allow researchers to co-create knowledge with communities rather than impose it upon them, aligning with critical and feminist traditions that view research as a dialogic process of learning and change (Fine, 2008; Worrall, 2016). This model is especially well suited to exploring the social impacts of hate graffiti, where community members are both the primary witnesses and the most capable agents of prevention.

Traditional top-down responses to graffiti focus on physical removal and enforcement, often overlooking the social meanings of hate imagery (Wilson, 2014). The PAR approach shifts this emphasis: rather than treating communities as passive victims of hate, it enables them to reflect, respond, and reclaim public spaces. The participatory design thus embodies the theoretical principle of community enacted public criminology; the idea that criminological insight should be activated through collective, local action.

The relationship between criminological theory, empirical observation, and participatory action was intentionally integrated within the research design. Empirical observation began with the identification of hate graffiti sites reported by community partners, which functioned as visible manifestations of symbolic harm. These observations were then situated within criminological theory through facilitated dialogue introducing concepts such as stigma (Goffman, 1963), symbolic violence (Perry, 2014), and ambient hate (Wilson, 2014). Importantly, theory was not imposed as an explanatory framework but introduced as an interpretive resource that participants could accept, challenge, or reinterpret in relation to their lived experience. Participatory action—the co-production of murals—represented the practical enactment of these theoretical insights. In this way, criminological theory moved beyond abstract explanation to become a tool for collective meaning-making and intervention. This integration reflects Freire's (2007) concept of praxis, in which reflection and action are mutually constitutive.

Site Selection and Participants

Between May 2022 and June 2024, six interventions were undertaken across Swansea. Swansea is a coastal city in South Wales, United Kingdom, with a population of approximately 251,300 (ONS mid-2024 population estimate, 2025). Historically shaped by industrial decline and subsequent economic restructuring, the city contains areas of significant socio-economic deprivation alongside university-led regeneration. Like many post-industrial urban centres, Swansea has experienced documented incidents of hate crime and community tension, making it an appropriate setting in which to examine place-based responses to symbolic harm. Sites were identified collaboratively with Swansea Council's Community Safety Partnership and local youth and community services. Each location had been affected by hate graffiti or hateful visuals (e.g., racist slogans, misogynistic images, far-right symbols) that had generated community concern.

A total of 140 individuals participated, comprising:

- 105 children and young people aged 8–17 from areas of high deprivation;
- 35 university students studying or interested in criminology, sociology, and social justice.

All 140 participants contributed to the intervention process itself, but data were collected from 118 participants, those who took part in post-session discussions, informal interviews, and mural celebration events where feedback was obtained. Fieldnotes also captured observational data across *all* sessions.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, consistent with participatory action research (PAR) approaches. Recruitment occurred through existing youth service provision, local schools, community centres, and university networks. This approach was selected because it:

1. allowed the project to embed activities within established community settings.
2. ensured accessibility for participants already affected by the presence of hate graffiti.
3. enabled continuity of engagement across multiple weeks.

While convenience sampling limits representativeness, it is considered appropriate within PAR, where the aim is depth of engagement and collective action rather than statistical generalisation (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The final sample reflects those who regularly used, worked within, or were directly affected by the project sites, aligning with the study's focus on place-based community response.

Intervention Structure

Each intervention followed a consistent four-stage process designed to move participants from reflection to action:

1. Dialogue and Reflection: Facilitated conversations encouraged participants to share their experiences and interpretations of hate graffiti in their communities. They discussed its intended messages, its impact, and how it made them feel.
2. Criminological Framing: Facilitators introduced accessible criminological concepts, such as hate crime, stigma, exclusion, and social harm, to situate local experiences within broader structural understandings of hate and community safety.
3. Creative Co-production: Working with local artists, participants developed positive visual responses through art. The use of visual and creative research methods (Carrabine, 2012; Mannay, 2016; Fraser and Matthews, 2021) provided a participatory mode of expression, allowing participants to challenge hate symbolically and reclaim agency over public narratives.
4. Public Installation and Celebration: Each project culminated in the installation of a public mural or art piece unveiled at a community event. Attendees included residents, councillors, PCSOs, Prevent officers, and parents, reinforcing the sense of collective ownership and celebration of diversity.

This sequence combined critical reflection, criminological education, and creative expression. It encouraged participants not only to "learn about" hate but to act against it through visible, collective transformation.

Role of the Researcher and Reflexivity

The lead researcher's dual position as both academic criminologist and facilitator was central to the process. This duality demanded conscious reflexivity regarding authority, voice, and positionality (England, 1994; Pillow, 2003). While criminological expertise

provided conceptual framing, the ethos of PAR required a redistribution of power: the researcher had to step back, allowing participants' perspectives to guide decisions about themes, imagery, and messaging.

This reflexive stance aligns with Fine's (2008) "epistemology of praxis," which argues that genuine collaboration requires scholars to recognise their partial perspectives and engage in continuous self-interrogation. Reflexivity was maintained through field journals, debrief discussions with youth workers, and iterative adaptation of sessions in response to participant feedback. By recognising the inherent tensions between academic aims (e.g., theorising hate and public criminology) and community priorities (e.g., reclaiming safety and belonging), the researcher sought to ensure co-production remained at the project's heart.

This reflexive negotiation was not merely theoretical but emerged in concrete moments of disagreement and recalibration. For example, during one intervention, the team initially proposed incorporating explicit anti-racist textual messaging within the mural, drawing on criminological understandings of counter-narratives and symbolic resistance. However, participants expressed a preference for visual symbols of belonging and unity rather than direct textual confrontation. Their concern was that overt messaging might provoke further vandalism or reinforce division rather than foster ownership. In response, the researcher deferred to participant priorities, recognising that community members possessed situated knowledge of local dynamics that exceeded external theoretical assumptions. Criminological expertise therefore functioned as a dialogic resource rather than a prescriptive authority. This exemplifies how criminological input was not subordinated in the sense of being abandoned but repositioned as one knowledge form among many. This redistribution of interpretive authority reflects participatory action research principles, in which epistemic legitimacy is shared rather than monopolised (Fine, 2008).

Data Collection and Analysis

Although FLP was primarily an intervention project, data were systematically gathered to capture impact and learning. Data sources included:

- fieldnotes documenting participant engagement and emergent themes.
- photographic evidence of the transformation of spaces; informal interviews and reflective discussions with participants, youth workers, and community partners
- public feedback gathered during mural celebration events.

These materials were analysed using thematic analysis. While early coding drew on the comparative logic often associated with grounded theory, the analysis did not seek to build formal theory. Instead, it followed the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012), who describe thematic analysis as "a method for systematically identifying,

organising and offering insight into patterns of meaning across a dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 57). This approach is particularly well suited to participatory and community-based criminological research because it enables researchers to make sense of shared meanings and collective experiences, rather than generate abstract theory.

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's phases of analysis, fieldnotes and discussion transcripts were read repeatedly before being open-coded to identify segments relating to participants' perceptions of fear, belonging, identity, safety, exclusion, and responsibility. Codes were then collated into candidate themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined in relation to the project's research questions and the broader literature on hate, symbolic harm, and community resilience (Bryman, 2016).

A second analytic cycle focused on divergent or outlier insights—points that appeared less frequently but deepened understanding of community tensions, challenges, or forms of resistance. Coding and theme development were undertaken collaboratively with a second researcher to enhance analytical reliability and reflexivity, in line with best practice in qualitative and participatory research (Nowell et al., 2017).

The final themes: (1) fear reduction and reassurance; (2) youth empowerment and positive identity; (3) intergenerational dialogue and cohesion; and (4) partnership and sustainability, structure the Findings and Discussion sections that follow.

Ethical Considerations

Given the involvement of children and young people, ethics were a central concern. The project received approval from the university ethics committee. Ethical procedures were guided by best practice in participatory research ethics (Banks and Armstrong, 2012) and informed by the safeguarding frameworks of partner organisations.

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental or guardian consent for minors. Consent was treated as an ongoing process, revisited at each stage of the project.
- Safeguarding protocols ensured that youth workers were present in all sessions and that disclosures of hate incidents were managed appropriately.
- Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved in reporting, with all visual materials reproduced only where consent had been explicitly provided.
- Wellbeing was prioritised: activities were designed to build confidence and cohesion rather than re-expose participants to trauma.

As Mannay (2016) notes, arts-based methods can raise complex ethical issues around representation and ownership; these were navigated through collective decision-making, with participants retaining control over how their work was displayed and described.

Methodological Limitations

This methodology carries several limitations. The project was geographically bounded, and participant numbers were modest, meaning findings cannot be generalised. The voluntary nature of participation may have introduced self-selection bias, favouring individuals already interested in community improvement. However, as Reason and Bradbury (2008) emphasise, the value of PAR lies in depth and transformative potential rather than statistical generalisation. The consistent emergence of common themes across six sites indicates conceptual robustness and suggests potential for broader application. These findings should be read as analytical rather than statistical generalisations: they indicate a replicable mechanism that can be adapted in comparable settings:

dialogue → criminological framing → co-creation → public celebration

The model's transferability rests on process fidelity (participation, safeguarding, co-production) rather than on Swansea-specific conditions.

Overview of the Flip the Streets Intervention Model

Flip the Streets (FLP) mobilises communities to counter hate graffiti through facilitated dialogue and co-produced public art. It was delivered through six place-based interventions across Swansea between 2022 and 2024, involving 140 participants (105 children and young people aged 8–17 and 35 university students), working alongside youth workers, local artists, community safety partners and the research team. Each intervention followed a four-stage cycle: (1) dialogue about local hate visuals and their impacts; (2) accessible criminological framing to contextualise experiences of harm, stigma and exclusion; (3) co-design and creation of a mural or visual response; and (4) public installation and celebration to consolidate community ownership and visibility. Data were gathered through fieldnotes, observations, informal interviews/discussions and public feedback at unveiling events and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The model's intended outcomes focus on perceptions of safety and belonging, youth identity and agency, intergenerational cohesion, and strengthened partnership working. This section outlines our participatory design and data strategy; we then present integrated findings illustrated with two explanatory vignettes, before drawing out theoretical and policy implications.

Case Study Context: Two Explanatory Vignettes

To illustrate how the Flip the Streets (FLP) model operated across diverse settings, this paper draws on two explanatory vignettes selected from the six interventions delivered between 2022 and 2024. These vignettes are not presented as standalone case studies or as the sole basis for analysis; rather, they provide contextual depth to support the thematic findings that follow. They are not analysed separately but serve to illustrate how themes manifested across different settings.

The first setting was a community youth centre located in an area experiencing repeated incidents of hate graffiti, including racist slogans and extremist symbols. The centre served children aged 7–14 from predominantly white working-class backgrounds, many of whom reported feeling unsettled by the hateful imagery. The intervention involved facilitated discussions, creative workshops, and the co-production of a public mural (see Figure 1).

The second setting was a youth training centre working with 12–17-year-olds, many referred through youth justice or school-exclusion pathways. Here, hate graffiti intersected with heightened concerns about antisocial behaviour, community–youth tensions, and stigma. The project provided a platform for participants to explore identity, public perception, and belonging while collectively producing a mural on the exterior of the centre (see Figure 2).

These two settings are used in the Findings as illustrative anchors, not because they were "better" or "more successful" than others, but because they encapsulate the broader mechanisms, tensions and outcomes observed across all six sites. The thematic analysis therefore reflects cross-site patterns, while the vignettes function as concrete narrative points to help the reader visualise how FLP unfolded in practice.

The next section presents four inductively derived themes emerging across all FLP interventions. Each theme describes a recurring community-level outcome and is supported, where relevant, by short illustrative examples taken from the two vignettes outlined above. This structure retains analytic coherence while providing grounded, context-rich insight into how FLP functioned as community enacted public criminology.

While the vignettes illustrate broadly positive trajectories, the intervention process was not devoid of contestation. Participants sometimes expressed differing interpretations of the graffiti and divergent views regarding appropriate responses. For example, some participants favoured removal without replacement, viewing artistic intervention as potentially legitimising the original graffiti as worthy of response. Others preferred overtly political messaging, while some advocated neutral or abstract imagery to avoid further conflict. These differences were negotiated through facilitated dialogue, with facilitators prioritising inclusive consensus rather than uniform agreement. The final mural designs therefore represent negotiated compromises rather than singular or uncontested visions. Acknowledging these tensions is important, as it underscores that community-enacted public criminology operates through deliberative negotiation rather than harmonious consensus.

These dynamics should be read against wider controversies in anti-racist politics and scholarship, including critical race perspectives that emphasise the contested meanings of racism and the risks of depoliticised consensus-building. The relatively constructive outcomes reported here reflect the project's facilitated, safeguarding-led design and the

participant groups accessed through community settings; they should not be taken to imply that responses to racist or hate graffiti are uniformly agreed in all contexts.

Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four interconnected outcomes across the six Flip the Streets (FLP) interventions. These outcomes recurred regardless of participant age, neighbourhood characteristics, or prior exposure to community-safety initiatives. To ground the themes in lived experience, illustrative examples are drawn from two settings outlined earlier: a community youth centre (Vignette 1) and a youth training centre (Vignette 2). These vignettes serve as contextual anchors rather than primary units of analysis.

1. Reclaiming Public Space: Reducing Fear and Ambient Insecurity

Across all sites, participants described hate graffiti as a visible reminder of hostility. Before the interventions, several reported "walking quickly past" hateful symbols or "feeling watched," demonstrating the psychological weight of public expressions of hate.

A youth worker (female, 32) reflected:

"People just got used to it. The kids started to think it was normal – part of the wall, part of the neighbourhood."

This normalisation aligns with Wilson's (2014) concept of ambient hate, where neglected hate visuals subtly communicate exclusion and erode everyday security. Participants frequently linked these visuals to heightened anxiety, reinforcing evidence that disorder cues can amplify fear (Taylor, Cordin & Njiru, 2010).

Illustrative vignette (V1)

At the community youth centre, children aged 7–14 initially described feeling "scared walking past it" (girl, 12) and "angry that people would write those things about our town" (boy, 13). Through dialogue, criminological framing, and co-design, these emotions were collectively processed. The resulting mural, featuring symbols of unity, including a "popcorn box loved by everyone", became a visible assertion of belonging.

Figure 1. Community Youth Centre Mural (CITY A), 2022[2]

[2] Source: Authors own work.

After installation, residents described the space as “safe again” (resident, female, 54). A youth worker summarised:

“The wall talks differently now.”

These shifts highlight how co-produced creative interventions can reconstitute collective identity and activate collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1997). Fear was not simply reduced through removal of offensive imagery but through community-led transformation of place.

2. Youth Empowerment and Identity Reframing

Young people were central to every FLP intervention and frequently reported feeling misrepresented or marginalised within wider community-safety narratives. This theme was particularly pronounced in Vignette 2, where youth had been publicly labelled as “troublemakers.”

Across sites, participants articulated frustration at being judged “before anyone talks to us” (boy, 16). Facilitated sessions used criminological concepts—labelling theory (Becker, 1963), stigma (Goffman, 1963), and desistance (Maruna, 2001)—as interpretive tools to make sense of these experiences.

Illustrative vignette (V2)

In the youth-training-centre project, participants explicitly linked stigma to reduced trust and opportunity. One girl (16) stated:

“It’s like we get punished for what people think, not what we do.”

The co-production of a large mural functioned as an act of identity reclamation, not only rejecting hate imagery but publicly asserting young people’s contribution to community life.

Figure 2. Youth Training Centre Mural (CITY A), 2023[3]

At the mural unveiling, a local resident (male, 71) admitted:

[3] Source: Authors own work.

“Seeing them do this has changed my mind.”

This demonstrates how creative public interventions can disrupt entrenched intergenerational stereotypes and enhance the legitimacy of youth participation. The findings align with research showing that empowerment and visibility support desistance and strengthen local cohesion (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016).

3. Intergenerational Dialogue and the Rebuilding of Social Cohesion

Unexpectedly, intergenerational contact emerged as one of the strongest cross-site outcomes. Parents and residents reported that the projects initiated “conversations we hadn’t had before” (parent, female, 40) about racism, fairness, and belonging.

Across interventions, murals became focal points for informal dialogue in local spaces: corridors, playgrounds, community halls, and public events. Teachers noted that students proudly presented their work in assemblies, embedding anti-hate narratives within school culture.

Illustrative connection to vignettes

In both the youth-centre and youth-training-centre sites, unveiling events brought together families, residents, youth workers, PCSOs, councillors, and Prevent officers. These encounters facilitated empathy and mutual recognition. As one parent (male, 45) at Vignette 1 explained:

“This got us talking at home about how hate makes people feel. We hadn’t spoken about that before.”

These dynamics reflect broader sociological findings on the importance of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) and reinforce Wilson’s (2014) argument that reclaiming spaces from hate helps re-establish the “moral order of belonging.”

4. Strengthened Local Partnerships and Civic Infrastructure

Across the six sites, FLP interventions catalysed new or strengthened working relationships between youth services, schools, community centres, local authority community-safety teams, PCSOs, Prevent officers, and university researchers.

Partnerships were marked by relational legitimacy rather than mere procedural compliance (Crawford & Cunningham, 2015). Council officers noted that mural projects achieved rapid trust-building that would have been difficult through formal consultation alone. Youth workers described the projects as “the first time the kids felt listened to by everyone.”

Vignette linkage

In both vignette settings, multi-agency engagement, specifically the presence of council staff and PCSOs at celebration events, contributed to stronger perceptions of institutional support and accountability.

This collaborative infrastructure embodies Boyle and Harris' (2009) principles of co-production: shared decision-making, distributed power, and mutual benefit. It also demonstrates how community enacted public criminology embeds criminological thinking within real-world civic processes, not merely academic discourse.

Synthesis: How Themes Link to Community Enacted Public Criminology

Together, these four outcomes illustrate the mechanisms through which the FLP model enacts a fourth strand of public criminology, one that:

- centres the lived experiences of communities most affected by harm,
- uses creative practice as a vehicle for criminological engagement,
- embeds criminology within the rhythms of local civic life, and
- produces visible, material transformations in public space.

Where traditional public criminology emphasises teaching, outreach, or policy commentary, FLP demonstrates that criminology can also be performed collaboratively, through dialogue, artmaking, partnership, and civic participation.

In this sense, the murals, events, and ongoing discussions are not merely outputs of a project but representations of criminological praxis (Freire, 2007): reflection and action united for social change.

It is also important to recognise that these outcomes were shaped by the participatory and voluntary nature of engagement. Participants were recruited through youth and community settings already oriented toward engagement and support, which may have facilitated constructive dialogue. Individuals holding more oppositional, disengaged, or hostile perspectives may have been less likely to participate. This highlights an important limitation: community-enacted public criminology may initially engage those most open to collaborative intervention, potentially leaving more polarised viewpoints underrepresented. However, rather than diminishing the significance of the findings, this underscores the importance of sustained engagement strategies capable of reaching wider and more diverse community constituencies over time.

Discussion: Advancing Public Criminology Through Community Enactment

The findings from FLP demonstrate empirically that criminology's public role must extend beyond dissemination and policy commentary toward forms of action embedded in communities. Public criminology, as conventionally defined, has focused on three main strands: pedagogic communication, outreach, and policy influence (Loader & Sparks,

2011). While these remain essential, critics have argued that public criminology risks becoming overly rhetorical unless it also generates practical, community-embedded forms of action. Turner (2013) argues that public criminology must "fight for truth" in ways that make harm visible and politically salient, while at the same time offering a form of praxis that speaks to the everyday conditions of inequality. The evidence presented here shows that FLP operationalises precisely this dual role.

Across six sites, the initiative demonstrated that criminology can be enacted within communities rather than simply communicated to them. Participants were not only introduced to concepts such as stigma, exclusion, hate crime, or desistance; they used these ideas to interpret local harms and to design creative, tangible responses. This marks an important conceptual shift. Rather than situating criminology as a mode of commentary, FLP positioned criminology as a collaborative practice—something participants *did* together. In doing so, the projects bridged the gap between public criminology as a form of explanation and public criminology as a form of intervention.

This approach aligns the project with, yet distinguishes it from, both justice-oriented public criminology (Henne & Shah, 2020) and activist criminology (Belknap, 2015). While these traditions call for criminological engagement with structures of inequality, they do not necessarily articulate how criminological theory can be co-produced and enacted through community-based, place-specific interventions. FLP adds this missing dimension. The integration of participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), arts-based and visual criminology (Carrabine, 2012; Young, 2014), and community safety practice allowed criminological concepts to be translated into public-facing forms of action that were meaningful to participants and visibly transformative in local spaces.

The findings show that three mechanisms were particularly important in enabling this enactment. First, dialogic exploration—rooted in Freirean pedagogy—supported participants to articulate how hate graffiti shaped their sense of belonging and safety. Second, creative co-production translated criminological analysis into collective action, offering a visible counter-narrative to ambient hate (Wilson, 2014). Third, public installation and celebration reinforced community ownership over safety and reconstituted public space as inclusive rather than exclusionary. These mechanisms enabled participants, especially young people, to gain a sense of agency that counters their frequent portrayal as sources of risk or disorder.

Collectively, these processes illustrate what this paper terms *community enacted public criminology:* a fourth strand that extends public criminology beyond education, outreach, or policy engagement. In this model, criminology is co-produced, visible, and participatory; its value lies not only in interpretation but in enabling communities to take action. Importantly, this does not diminish the academic core of criminology. Instead, the co-production of theory and intervention—seen here in the use of labelling, stigma,

desistance, and place-based harm, illustrates how criminological insight becomes more robust when developed alongside those most affected by everyday insecurity.

The findings also demonstrate that arts-based and visual methods are not simply vehicles for aesthetic improvement but are criminological tools. The murals acted as shared symbols of cohesion, enabling intergenerational dialogue and reinforcing community efficacy. In this sense, the creative processes were both data and intervention, revealing how meaning-making and crime prevention can intersect. The initiative suggests that criminology can find renewed public relevance when it adopts methods capable of producing both analytical insight and social transformation.

Finally, the project exposes the limitations of conventional responses to hate graffiti that focus on rapid removal. While removal addresses immediate visibility, it does not address the underlying social dynamics that give rise to hate or the symbolic harms that residents experience. The findings show that when communities reclaim spaces through co-produced art, the outcome is more than environmental improvement: it is the restoration of dignity, belonging, and shared responsibility. These are core ingredients of community safety, yet they are rarely captured within statutory performance indicators.

In sum, the FLP initiative demonstrates that public criminology can be most powerful when enacted with communities, through participatory, creative, and theoretically informed practice. The model offers a scalable and evidence-informed framework for local authorities, practitioners, and scholars seeking to build resilience and reduce harm through collective ownership of public space. In doing so, it extends the conceptual boundaries of public criminology and provides a practical illustration of what a fourth, community enacted strand can achieve.

The findings also illuminate the inherently political nature of co-production. Community priorities are not singular or fixed; they are plural, dynamic, and sometimes internally contested. The process of determining appropriate responses to hate graffiti therefore involved negotiation between different normative orientations, including restorative, preventative, expressive, and symbolic objectives. In some instances, participants prioritised emotional reassurance and belonging, while institutional partners emphasised deterrence or formal prevention goals. These differing orientations did not invalidate the co-production process but constituted its core democratic function. Community-enacted public criminology does not eliminate conflict but provides structured spaces through which conflicting interpretations of harm and justice can be articulated and negotiated. This reflects Mouffe's (2005) concept of agonistic engagement, in which democratic practice emerges through negotiated disagreement rather than imposed consensus.

Importantly, criminological expertise remained essential within this process, but its role shifted. Rather than determining outcomes, criminological knowledge provided conceptual tools that participants could mobilise or reinterpret. This repositioning

enhances rather than diminishes criminology's relevance, as it enables theory to be tested, refined, and grounded within lived realities. The outcome is not the subordination of criminology to community priorities, but a reconfiguration of criminological authority into a collaborative and dialogic form.

2. Policy and Practice Implications

The findings from Flip the Streets (FLP) demonstrate that creative, community-led responses to hate graffiti can make measurable contributions to reassurance, cohesion, and youth engagement. To translate these insights into policy and practice, the following implications are offered:

1. Embed creative community interventions into hate prevention strategies.

Local authorities, community safety partnerships, and Safer Streets programmes should recognise arts-based, participatory interventions as legitimate components of hate crime prevention. These approaches do not simply remove hateful imagery; they build resilience, challenge ambient hate, and promote shared ownership of public space.

2. Position young people as co-producers of community safety.

Youth services, schools, and police–community partnerships should establish sustained platforms for youth participation in local safety initiatives. The FLP model shows that when young people design visible, positive interventions, they shift public narratives and strengthen their own sense of agency and belonging.

3. Formalise multi-agency co-production models.

FLP underscores the value of partnerships between councils, youth services, local artists, police community support officers, and universities. Co-production should be consolidated through formal frameworks that emphasise shared decision-making, relational legitimacy, and inclusive design, rather than consultation alone.

4. Develop broader metrics for belonging and reassurance.

Current evaluation tools prioritise crime statistics, which do not capture improvements in community confidence or inclusion. Local partnerships could supplement standard metrics with qualitative indicators—such as perception surveys, legacy studies of public artwork, and measures of intergenerational engagement—to capture the holistic nature of community-led safety.

5. Consider national scalability.

Given its adaptability and low resource requirements, FLP provides a scalable model for other localities. A Welsh or UK-wide pilot—potentially under the Safer Streets or Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan frameworks—could support comparative evaluation and embed creative hate-prevention interventions into national practice.

Limitations and Future Research

FLP's participatory design enabled rich, context-specific insight, but several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the project was geographically bounded within Swansea. While findings are analytically transferable, they are not statistically generalisable. Future research could test the model across different regions, demographics, and socio-political contexts to assess its consistency and sensitivity to local variation.

Second, participation was voluntary and largely recruited through youth centres, schools, and community programmes. This convenience sampling may have attracted individuals predisposed toward positive engagement or with existing relationships to youth services. A fuller sampling frame, including more disengaged youth or residents with more negative perceptions, would add depth to future analysis.

Third, the evaluation captured primarily short-term impacts. While early follow-up visits indicated ongoing community pride and continued visibility of the murals, longitudinal research is needed to understand whether improvements in reassurance, belonging, and cohesion persist over time, and whether creative co-production has lasting effects on youth identity, stigma resistance, or community–police relations.

Fourth, the qualitative thematic analysis relied on fieldnotes, observations, and participant feedback. While appropriate for exploratory community-based research, future studies could integrate complementary mixed-methods approaches, including perception surveys, environmental audits, or measures of footfall and space usage to strengthen causal inference and triangulate findings.

Fifth, further work is needed to examine how community enacted public criminology operates in contexts of resource austerity, political resistance, or contested public space. Understanding the conditions under which co-production thrives, or is constrained, will help refine the model and support its integration into policy and practice.

Finally, future research should examine how community-enacted public criminology operates in contexts characterised by greater conflict, resistance, or political polarisation. The relatively constructive engagement observed here reflects both the participatory design and the specific local contexts in which interventions were delivered. More contested environments may generate different dynamics, including resistance to intervention or disagreement over the legitimacy of hate classifications themselves. Understanding these conditions will be critical to refining the model and assessing its robustness across diverse social and political settings.

Conclusion

The Flip the Streets (FLP) initiative has shown that criminology can operate not only in the realms of communication, advocacy, or policy influence, but within communities themselves. By combining criminological reflection with participatory, creative practice, FLP enabled residents, particularly young people, to reclaim public spaces, challenge hate, and co-produce safer environments. These outcomes reaffirm that community safety is built not solely through enforcement but through belonging, dialogue, and shared ownership of place.

The project also advances the discipline's theoretical boundaries. By demonstrating how criminological concepts can be enacted collectively and visibly in local settings, FLP offers an empirical foundation for community enacted public criminology, a proposed fourth strand that complements and extends existing models of public criminology (Loader & Sparks, 2011; Turner, 2013). This strand positions communities as active theorists and co-producers of harm prevention, aligning criminological insight with the everyday work of resilience and cohesion.

For policymakers, FLP highlights the value of creative, community-led interventions as a legitimate component of hate crime prevention and community safety. Local authorities and Safer Streets partnerships can adapt this model by integrating arts-based engagement, youth participation, and multi-agency co-production into strategic plans. These approaches deliver both symbolic and practical benefits: visible affirmation of inclusion, strengthened community efficacy, and durable partnerships.

While bounded by geography and scale, the model is transferable. Its core mechanisms: dialogue, collaborative analysis, creative co-production, and public celebration, can be adopted in diverse local settings. Future research should explore these adaptations, assess long-term impacts on safety and belonging, and further theorise the conditions under which community enacted public criminology can shape sustainable social change.

FLP demonstrates that criminology's public mission is most powerful when theory and action meet. In reclaiming spaces marked by hate, communities also reclaimed criminology itself—as a shared language, a practical tool, and a catalyst for collective transformation.

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