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RESEARCH

Context matters: lessons from the implementation of SafeGrowth in Sweden

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Abstract

This article highlights how context matters in the implementation of a crime prevention initiative, exemplified by the implementation of the SafeGrowth method at Drottninghög, Helsingborg, Sweden. Drottninghög is the first area in Europe where SafeGrowth has been implemented, and the article is based on a report of the implementation process. The report, published in 2022, was based on qualitative material collected during the implementation of SafeGrowth between 2021 and 2022. The learnings from the report have been re-analysed using content analysis, with a specific focus on contextual matters. In the results, we present six identified contextual matters that are of general interest, namely: educational context, theoretical context, juridical context, issues of moving between different crime-contexts, place context and organizational context. The first two matters are closely connected to the SafeGrowth method, and the latter four are more generic in crime preventive work.

Keywords Crime prevention · Context · Implementation · Residential areas · SafeGrowth · Sweden

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Introduction

This article explores how context matters in crime prevention by re-analysing an evaluation of the implementation process of the Canadian method SafeGrowth in the area of Drottninghög in Helsingborg, Sweden. The evaluation was conducted from 2020 to 2022 and has previously been published in a report (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). SafeGrowth is a method based on Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), developed by a private company and has been implemented in a selection of areas in Canada, New Zealand and the US. Drottninghög in Helsingborg is the first residential area in Europe where the SafeGrowth method is implemented, which makes this process important in relation to adaptation, challenges and opportunities in moving a crime preventive method from one geographic setting to another. The implementation of SafeGrowth raises questions of general interest about what role context plays in crime prevention and how methods require adaptations to fit the needs, resources and cultural context of the community (Castro et al. 2004). Hence, crime preventive work needs to be systematically implemented and contextualized to be effective, which addresses not only spatial aspects but also social, cultural and juridical contexts, which gives both opportunities and challenges in practical work.

The consultant company SafeGrowth and the implementation on Drottninghög

SafeGrowth is a private, commercial company, which works as a consultancy to implement the SafeGrowth method in different residential areas. The SafeGrowth method was developed in Canada by the Canadian police and criminologist Gregory Saville (launched in 2007) with the ambition of spreading the method globally. SafeGrowth has previously been implemented in a selection of neighbourhoods in Canada, New Zealand and the US. The overall principle of *To-For-With-By* is the core of the method, expressed to go from the traditional top-down implementation to use a bottom-up perspective, with local resources and participation to solve local problems identified by the residents themselves (Hodkinson and Andresen 2025). SafeGrowth also states the ambition to go beyond ordinary crime preventive methods and is conceptualized as a philosophy, with a specific form of 'SafeGrowth thinking'. SafeGrowth-thinking, in short, is future-oriented, creating new understandings of neighbourhoods, based on collective efficacy, which will lead to radical transformations (Saville 2018).

The crime preventive approach of SafeGrowth consists of two different parts. Firstly, the company has created a 'SafeGrowth Academy', which is based on the company's interpretations of various crime prevention and safer communities approaches. At its core is what is described as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) generation 2, but also contains elements of urban planning and principles related to local governance and co-creation.

Secondly, there is a collaborative implementation process that is based on the participants' conceptualisations of the place and the crime problems. To work with the collaborative implementation, the participants need to join the SafeGrowth Academy, where they are introduced to the concept of SafeGrowth, the method and the theoretical implications behind SafeGrowth. In contrast to many other crime preventive

initiatives, SafeGrowth has a more explicit ontological orientation and educational setting, which is taught to the participants by the SafeGrowth Academy (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

Reasons for implementing SafeGrowth at Drottninghög

Drottninghög is a residential area located in Helsingborg in southern Sweden with approximately 2700 residents. The area was mainly built during 1966–1969, with modernist design principles (cf. Hall and Vidén 2005; Hall 1996). Drottninghög was part of the Swedish so-called million programme (Brunnström et al. 2021). The Million Programme's multi-housing areas are nowadays largely considered marginalized areas, and the residents often have an immigrant background, limited financial resources and/or experience social exclusion. Since 2017 Drottninghög has been defined as a so-called "risk area" according to the Swedish police authorities (2023), one of three categories (vulnerable areas, risk areas and special vulnerable areas) used to describe crime occurrences in Swedish neighbourhoods.

Risk areas, such as Drottninghög, often have problems with open-air drug dealing, expressions of dissatisfaction with society and incidents of violence (cf. Gerell et al. 2021; Guldåker et al. 2021). When SafeGrowth was implemented in Drottninghög 2021–2022, open-air drug dealing was considered especially problematic, rather than criminal networks and violence. The implementation of SafeGrowth was motivated by an aspiration on the part of the City of Helsingborg to try something pioneering, which also included co-design, local governance and giving citizens an opportunity to influence the development in their own residential area (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

SafeGrowth was a part of a more extensive process to reverse the negative trend in Drottninghög. The City of Helsingborg and the local housing company Helsingborgshem implemented the DrottningH project in 2011, which, over a period of 20 years, will work to counteract the problems that have arisen, including safety issues. DrottningH aims to collaborate with residents in the area and create a long-term relationship between residents and the municipality[1].

To sum up, the implementation of SafeGrowth was conducted in an area with both an ongoing process of quite successful preventive work and with a crime problem identified by the municipality (open-air drug dealing) which also was well known and addressed by the local police. The SafeGrowth bottom-up perspective therefore was consistent with the ongoing process in the area.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background emerges from notions on the importance of context in crime prevention. Effective implementation of crime prevention greatly depends on context; hence strategies or initiatives that succeeded in one neighborhood may not work in another. Crime is shaped by local social, economic, cultural, and spatial contexts. Interventions therefore need to be adapted to local conditions in terms of social,

[1] https://drottningh.helsingborg.se

cultural and organizational prerequisites, and implementation is not 'simply' about just applying a predefined model or strategy (Ekblom 2011; Hodkinson and Andresen 2025). Research on popular placemaking approaches in relation to place development has also stated that even though the ambition is to work from the local context, top-down issues tend to dominate the approaches, creating unbalanced and unequal participation of residents and local stakeholders (Duconseille and Saner 2020; Loh et al. 2024). Hence, context is not a secondary consideration in crime prevention; instead, it is a core element in design, implementation and sustainability of crime preventive work.

Understanding context is important as it enables the creation of interventions that are realistic, logically relevant and capable of producing lasting reductions in crime.

Understanding local contexts also requires collaboration between actors, not only the police and municipality, but also property owners and community members, who each can contribute different forms of contextual understanding. Moreover, in crime prevention methods that involve multiple actors, effectiveness is also dependent on how the involved actors interpret the crime problem and coordinate resources. Implementation often fails because contextual barriers are overlooked, such as lack of trust or conflicting priorities (Ekblom 2011). This implies that prevention is related to organizational learning and flexibility and sensitivity, not only to local conditions, but also to organisational mandates and juridical settings.

Perception and understanding of crime, crime occurrence and crime mechanisms are also dependent on translation from theory to practice, and implementation of crime prevention needs to bridge the gap between criminological research and practical application, and be informed by translational approaches (cf. Cherney 2005; Weisburd 2022). A complex challenge in this regard is whether the model being used is truly grounded in the local context, but also what happens when such a model is transferred from one geographical context to another.

Hence, crime prevention work that addresses place-based strategies, such as CPTED and situational crime prevention, should also focus on the immediate environment, and how opportunities for crime emerge from both social and physical conditions (Clarke and Eck 2005; Clarke 1992).

Together, these previous notions on context from a criminological viewpoint stress that all crime prevention implementation needs to be contextualized. This highlights that the implementation of the SafeGrowth method in Drottninghög needs to address both social, cultural, juridical and organizational contexts—as well as collaborative matters related to interpretation and knowledge of crime occurrences and translation from theory to practice.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the article is to discuss how context matters in the implementation of crime prevention and contribute to identifying which challenges occur when methods like SafeGrowth are implemented in new contexts. The following research questions will be addressed:

(1) Which contextual matters can be identified in relation to the implementation of SafeGrowth in Drottninghög?
(2) In what way can lessons from the implementation of SafeGrowth contribute to crime prevention work on a general level?

Method

The qualitative study on which this article draws is based on documents, focus group interviews and observations which were analysed in the report *Implementeringen av SafeGrowth på Drottninghög* (The implementation of SafeGrowth at Drottninghög) (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). In this article, the study was re-analysed to enable a more detailed analysis of the specific problem of context. In this section we will first present our chosen study object, followed by the original data collection and analysis.

The study object: implementation of SafeGrowth at Drottninghög

As mentioned above, Drottninghög is part of the Swedish so-called Million Programme and defined by the police as a risk area. Drottninghög is also considered to have high levels of different forms of vulnerability, such as foreign background (76%), low education (36.4% are not eligible for upper secondary education) and a high rate of unemployment (19%), which makes it similar to other vulnerable areas in both Sweden and internationally. The implementation of SafeGrowth took place in 2021–2022, and included a training program involving residents, officials and professionals at Drottninghög (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). The training used course material developed by SafeGrowth, and consisted of three teaching sessions, followed by seven weeks of project work. The content of the training consisted, in brief, of both theoretical elements (especially CPTED generation 2) and practical elements (site visits, resident dialogue and project work). During the project work, which was carried out in three groups, a problem area was identified by the project members. They then worked in a five-step process; vision of place, identified problems, analysis, implementing strategies or measures and evaluation.

Data collection

The collected material in the evaluation process was based on qualitative triangulation, including documents, interviews and multi-sited ethnography (cf. Marcus 1995). The diversity of methods was important for understanding different dimensions of the problem and discovering potential discrepancies between what was stated and what actually happened (cf. Kwame Harrison 2020). The documents used in the analysis were collected from the SafeGrowth Academia and consisted of course material from the company (course book and safety audits) and the participants' reports from the conducted project work at Drottninghög. The documents provided information regarding the theoretical framework applied in the process and the basis for crime preventive measures in the area.

Material was also collected through five focus group interviews, with a total of 13 informants: five officials, three team leaders, three area police officers, one representative of Helsingborgshem and one representative of SafeGrowth (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). The interviews had a semi-structured character based on four central themes: initial contact with SafeGrowth, experiences of the education in the SafeGrowth Academy, experiences of the work and expectations regarding SafeGrowth in the future. Due to the open format, the interviewees steered the conversation in different directions (cf. Brinkmann 2020). The interviews were conducted digitally (with Zoom) and were transcribed afterwards (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

In addition, participatory observations were used as a method to follow the process and were conducted during the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022. The observations were of ethnographic character, conducted in relation to various parts of the implementation process. The ethnographic method is fluid and imprecise in nature, and is based on capitalizing on everyday situations, which often arise through the trust built between the researcher and the study participants (Müller 2021; cf. Low 2015). Some of the most important observations involved participation in the SafeGrowth Academy, where continuous observation took place over two days and was carefully documented in the form of detailed descriptions. This was followed by participation in the implementation process. Sometimes formal meetings in a room were observed, where various issues were discussed, and sometimes the observations were 'walkabouts', when part of the method was carried out outside in the public environment. Others were conducted in relation to the SafeGrowth academia and SafeGrowth-related activities.

In total, approximately 15 observations were made during these more structured sessions, and they usually lasted about two hours. One of the researchers lived near Drottninghög and went about their daily life there; in addition to the aforementioned observations, informal conversations therefore also took place in relation to everyday situations that arose. The observations were documented in field notes, which also included brief field interviews with participants. In line with Emerson et al. (1995), the field notes evolved from first jotting down notes at the site, then, after the observation, the field notes were expanded with additional detail and a reflection.

Analysis

In the analysis for this article, the material in the report was analysed using content analysis (Krippendorff 1980). The material was coded in two steps, first in relation to the themes that clearly appeared in the material, such as translation from theory to practice, work processes and methods. The second step aimed for more refined coding, by breaking down overarching themes into sub-themes to find latent connections between the SafeGrowth implementation process and the influence of crucial contextual factors. This re-analysis identified six contextual matters: educational, theoretical, juridical, crime specific, place specific and the organizational context.

Human ethics and consent to participate declarations

The data collection process, analysis, and presentation of the results adhered to the ethical principles discussed by Swedish Research Council (2024)[2]. During the data collection, participants were informed that their participation was optional, that they would remain anonymous, and that the researchers were interested in their opinions of the SafeGrowth method, and not their personal data or opinions. All participants gave their consent for us to attend and observe meetings. The focus group interviews concerned the SafeGrowth methodology, and no personal data were shared with us. Based on Swedish legislation, an ethical review was not required for this.

Results

In this section, we present the six contextual matters identified in the re-analysis of the implementation process of SafeGrowth at Drottninghög; educational, theoretical, juridical, crime specific, place specific and the organizational context. The results underscore, in line with previous research, that context is not merely a background condition, but a central factor influencing the success, adaptation and sustainability of crime prevention. Collectively, these matters illustrate the importance of understanding implementation as context-dependent rather than uniform across settings.

Processes and praxis: educational and theoretical context in relation to the residents

By following the process and praxis of SafeGrowth specifically, it becomes clear that there were discrepancies within and between the given theoretical approach in the SafeGrowth academia, the context at Drottninghög and the needs that were identified during the process of implementation. The theoretical approach and the educational process are therefore the first two identified contextual matters in relation to the implementation of SafeGrowth at Drottninghög.

Educational setting

In the process of working with the SafeGrowth concept, there are, according to the creators, similarities to work with an action research method (AR). In AR the researcher, practitioner and research client should collaborate in a democratic manner (Hodkinson and Saville 2018). The AR method is related to the Chicago school and participatory action research (PAR) processes (cf. Whyte 1989).

Coming from AR, the implementation of SafeGrowth follows a specific, structured procedure in different steps: first, the participants take part in a course arranged by the SafeGrowth Academia to learn about theory and to work with crime prevention. During the course, the residents are divided into teams and given the task to define

[2] https://www.vr.se/english/just-now/news/news-archive/2024-10-02-new-edition-of-the-swedish-research-councils-publication-good-research-practice.html?tag=Ethics.

problems related to crime, fear of crime and safety issues at specific sites in their own neighbourhood. This process should function as a bottom-up process, supported by team-leaders, SafeGrowth-staff, local organizations and municipal authorities (Hodkinson and Saville 2018). The suggested interventions could be related to physical change, but more important is the development of social relations and capacity in the area, which is in line with placemaking approaches (Duconseille and Saner 2020). All the findings and suggestions are documented in a written project report authored by the participants. This approach mirrors the main idea in SafeGrowth, namely that local problems need to be both 'owned and solved' by residents, to enable an ongoing project, one local site at a time, with the hope that the method will spread from neighbourhood to neighbourhood (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

The process of SafeGrowth might also be related to problem-based learning (PBL). In PBL, learning should be based on the jointly *identified problem*, which is jointly formulated, jointly analysed with the ambition to jointly form a solution (Steinemann 2003). Hence, during implementation, the teams initially defined the crime and/or safety problem in a chosen, geographically limited area and formulated a vision for what change was seemingly needed. The next step is to investigate the validity of the initial considerations formulated by the teams, which are subjective in nature, through several investigations, such as carrying out interviews with other residents, conducting safety audits and mapping of assets and opportunities in the area. From that step, there will be a firmer understanding of common experiences, needs and considerations. The next step is to identify different solutions and suggest interventions to work with in the area.

From the educational perspective of the SafeGrowth Academy, the method must be considered more of a PBL-based *learning* process than AR or PAR, but with the rather unorthodox strategy of *first developing* a "proper" interpretation of crime-preventative methods, and *then* problematise the local context from only that point of view (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). Thus, in the SafeGrowth Academia, the participants *first* learn how to understand an interpretation of security methods from SafeGrowth, which was developed in another country in relation to other crimes and security issues—and *then* to design a process based on the residents' understanding of their own problem that comes from the local context.

The ambition to educate the participants within the SafeGrowth Academy also seems to have been a way to create 'pracademics'. Hence, pracademics are necessary for designing and implementing interventions that are both theoretically sound and practically viable (Agar et al. 2023), But here, the educational setting and process, made it hard to apply the local knowledge in relation to theory, which was emphasized by our second matter.

Adaptation of theory and theoretical use: contextualizing a framework

In relation to the educational setting, we also identified some discrepancies between theoretical stance, theoretical adaptation and crime preventive initiatives. The contextual setting of the adapted theories is therefore our second contextual matter.

Crime prevention initiatives in SafeGrowth emanate from CPTED, and especially generation 2. In short, second-generation CPTED has moved beyond previous

strategies related to defensible space and the use of purely architectural strategies for crime prevention, instead aiming to combine architectural principles with factors related to the area's social profile, the use of the area, its users, and how the physical environment can contribute to social values (Cozens and Love 2015; Saville and Cleveland 1997; Reynalds and Mihinjac 2019). These strategies therefore move beyond identifying opportunity structures related to crime and redesigning the physical environment; they also need to account for and enable social cohesion, community culture, connectivity and threshold capacity by focusing on usability and activity support (Saville and Cleveland 1997; Thodelius 2018). In line with the development of CPTED, two theoretical perspectives are advocated; either a more theoretical and analytic approach in CPTED focusing on people/environment interactions (Ekblom 2019) or a more integrative CPTED which should also include situational crime prevention with a focus on rational choice theory and routine activity theory (Reynald and Mihinjac 2019).

In relation to SafeGrowth, the latter perspective, with a focus on routines and rational choice, seemingly predominated in SafeGrowth's course book and course material, but it was not consistent throughout the material. Instead, the course material consisted of different theoretical claims and traditions and appeared to be quite eclectic. An example of this eclectic stance is the total number of references in the course material: 20 unique theoretical perspectives and 111 theoretical references and/or concepts (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

The theoretical material was difficult for some participants to interpret and apply, as was clearly shown during the course as some of the residents did not grasp the content of the theories and some lost interest. (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). In addition, the material was also written in English, and the participants therefore were dependent on second-hand translations of the material to Swedish conducted by the team leaders, which, in turn, made it difficult for the participants to analyse crime causation and suggest interventions especially related to CPTED. Participants were also supposed to produce reports, although many of the participating residents were not sufficiently familiar with the Swedish language. This resulted in reports produced by the team leaders from the municipality rather than the residents (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). From that point of view, the claim of working bottom-up from the local context was challenged not only by the given theoretical framework. The participants also had a constant need to be guided by the SafeGrowth team or the other experts that were involved.

In the process the residents' focus was in line with how they usually worked with the municipality representatives in the area, rather than addressing crime-related issues such as the open-air drug problem in the area. SafeGrowth might therefore also have been absorbed and mixed in to surrounding parallel projects running at the time at Drottninghög; these projects were also aiming at increasing the area's degree of social cohesion—which makes it hard for the participants to distinguish different initiatives and involvements (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

The methodological and theoretical slippages show difficulties in contextualising crime preventative models in a way that makes the residents understand what processes and theories the method contains, as well as creating a process that remains open to local perspectives and needs. The academic claims might also be problematic

if residents think they are working with a very specific theory when they are really doing something else (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

Contextualizing crime prevention initiatives in the juridical context

Since SafeGrowth was developed in a North American context, some of the prerequisites for the method were transferred from one organisational and juridical context to another, which is the third contextual matter that might create clashes in crime preventive work.

As addressed previously, SafeGrowth emphasised the importance of introducing and using CPTED (mixed with other methods) in Drottninghög. However, CPTED and situational preventive strategies are already introduced and used in Sweden (see for example The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 1983; The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning 2019). In addition, SafeGrowth also highlights the importance of safety, security and equity, which have already been widely addressed in the Swedish building policies since 1998 (The National Board of Housing, Building and and Planning 1998; 2019). This resulted in a discrepancy between SafeGrowth's understanding of Swedish praxis and their contribution to the crime prevention work in terms of methods.

The lack of adaptation to the specific juridical context was also visible in SafeGrowth's relation to police professionals and their crime preventive mission, thus Swedish policing practices have different regulations and processes in the crime preventative work in Sweden compared to North America. In the case of Drottninghög, the police professionals were not fully involved in SafeGrowth, creating some misunderstandings and risks of counterproductive strategies (Nilsson et al. 2023).

A challenge in the implementation of SafeGrowth at Drottninghög was also related to letting the residents take over responsibility and truly work with local governance as suggested in the SafeGrowth method. At Drottninghög this was hard to fulfil due to municipal regulations and policies (cf. Nilsson et al. 2023).

This stresses the importance of understanding different practices as context-bound, hence effective crime prevention needs to integrate policy and practice (Willis and Toronjo 2019). Otherwise, there is a risk that the method, which may be implemented at a high financial cost, will not add expected value, or will create juridical slippery slopes that will undermine the method's crime prevention potential.

Moving between different crime-contexts

The fourth identified contextual matter in relation to SafeGrowth is the need to adapt crime-preventive methods to the local crime context. This matter has been identified in the re-analysis as issues relating to moving between crime contexts. Previously SafeGrowth has predominantly been implemented in areas with extremely high-crime problems and/or serious safety issues, like extreme poverty, gangs, shootings and fear among the residents. Drottninghög in Helsingborg is indeed defined as a risk area, but the crime was not of that severity as in some of the areas in which the method was formed and conducted (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

The context from which SafeGrowth originated was evident in the examples used in the education, which concerned gang-related shootings, certain predatory crime, etc. and these examples were hard for the participants to adapt to their own residential context. Problems existing at Drottninghög, such as open-air drug dealing, were not addressed by SafeGrowth (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). This issue might present a risk in crime preventative work, as this highlights how the perception of the local crime problem might be reframed to align with the method, rather than the method being tailored to the actual crime context.

Understanding the place context

Crime prevention and safety methods like SafeGrowth are also dependent on an understanding of place and its complexity, especially because of the risks of relying not only on definitions of crime situations but also on perceptions of place constructed in another geographical, cultural, and social context. The contextual matter related to place is therefore the fifth contextual matter identified in our case.

As is well known in the literature, places are highly complex, both fixed and fluid constructions, characterized by both material and immaterial aspects (cf. de Certeau 1984; Allen et al. 1999). Places are characterised by various forms of human relations and narratives that shape perceptions both inside the community and in relation to the surrounding society (cf. Trigg 2012; Högdahl, 2003). Crime preventive methods like SafeGrowth must therefore always take their starting point in the character and complexity of the specific location and develop a deeper understanding of the local relationships (cf. Duconseille and Saner 2020).

To start with a fixed method in a new context runs the risk of being counterproductive since the process does not in practice start from the residents' perspectives or from the local place, which is especially crucial in the work with CPTED or similar place-based methods. This is especially related to previous discussions on residents' opportunities to contribute. Language issues, unclear perception of place-related problems and lack of understanding of the everyday setting and practices might result in an unwanted top-down approach and an adaptation to a narrative that has been created somewhere else. This became especially clear during the SafeGrowth course that initiated the process with the residents, as the SafeGrowth staff during walkabouts narrated the area as a zone where criminals were hanging out in risky dark corners in early evenings at the same time as children walked by unabashedly and fearlessly on their way home (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022).

Moving from consultative business to municipality work

Finally, it is important to address the challenge of mixing consultative business with tax-funded municipal work, in terms of organizational context. The sixth identified challenge concerns the risk of not using the most appropriate skills and methods in crime prevention by working with a private company.

Accordingly, SafeGrowth is a private business that sells consultative support and a specific crime preventive method. This, in turn, means that the SafeGrowth method is a one-size-fits-all package when it comes to course material, risk assessment analyses

and safety audits, which does not always align with the ambition to work from local conditions, as claimed, for instance, by Saville (2018), and Hodkinson and Andresen (2025). This can be related to that too much adaptation to local context might perhaps undermine the brand and economic core of the company as well as the hierarchy of knowledge from the company's point of view (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). When will the method become something other than SafeGrowth? The avoidance of a second opinion or other suggestion is highlighted by the fact that SafeGrowth documents are only available on a password-protected website, making it impossible for outsiders to look at them or evaluate them. This is especially striking coming from a Swedish context, with a strong tradition of openness and public scrutiny.

Context matters

The six identified contextual matters, educational, theoretical, juridical, crime specific, place specific and the organizational context, identified in the case of implementing SafeGrowth at Drottninghög, show that moving methods between geographic settings involves not only opportunities but also challenges. The contextual challenges are interrelated and affect implementation, in particular the results suggest that insufficient alignment between the SafeGrowth method and local context created practical and conceptual tension during the implementation. The findings are in line with previous research (see Ekblom 2011) but provide a useful empirical illustration of pitfalls in crime prevention and how easily context can be overlooked.

Discussion

The aim of the article was to discuss how context matters in the implementation of crime prevention and contribute to identifying challenges when methods like SafeGrowth are implemented in new contexts. The analysis identified six contextual matters related to the implementation of SafeGrowth in Drottninghög, of which two are more closely related to the method itself, namely the educational and theoretical context, although they are also of general interest. One concerns the process and the collaboration between a private company (SafeGrowth) and the municipality (of Helsingborg).

The remaining three—juridical context, crime context, and place—are more general; hence, these three create local conditions and prerequisites for crime prevention.

In line with Garland (2001) and Ekblom (2011), we argue that crime prevention initiatives need to be carefully chosen, contextualized and evaluated, and that lessons can always be learned regarding how to adapt crime preventive initiatives to local conditions. The lessons learned from SafeGrowth are therefore of interest, not as an evaluation of the company's abilities but rather as examples of challenges related to working in the complexity of different contexts (Högdahl and Thodelius 2022). There are similarities between moving crime prevention initiatives and translational criminology, especially since the latter highlights the importance of the development of crime prevention, policy-practice integration and the need of pracademics (Willis and Toronjo 2019; Nichols et al. 2019). Working with the claim of using a problem-

oriented approach from a bottom-up perspective presents certain challenges. One of the most obvious risks that emerges in several of the contextual challenges is that the processes intended to be inclusive, creative, and site-specific are instead guided by predetermined approaches and perspectives. The processes become shaped and governed in a way that does not correspond with the proclaimed aim, intentions or claims of the method. Therefore, adapting both theories and methods to local contexts and needs from the very beginning is crucial to a crime prevention method's ability to contribute to improvements for people living in places considered vulnerable or unsafe (cf. Loh et al. 2024).

It is also important to note that the implementation of the SafeGrowth method was a part of a long-term effort by the City of Helsingborg to develop Drottninghög, including different initiatives and methods. The project DrottningH has resulted in an increase in perceived safety in the area. According to the regular security survey carried out by the police, the Drottninghög neighbourhood in 2024 is perceived as safer than Helsingborg on average and in line with more affluent areas. The role that SafeGrowth played in this is difficult to determine, but it shows the relevance of working with long-term and inclusive methods, and to make them work in the long run.

Conclusion

To conclude, the context is important and if a municipality wants to implement a crime preventive method, they need to carefully consider which contextual matters will affect the implementation.

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Author contributions EH and CT were the driving forces in the collection of material in the investigated site. CT and EH also had the contacts with the investigated company, and the city of Helsingborg. CT worked with analyzing documents and also did the interviews together with EH. EH worked with participatory observation and did the interviews together with CT. KN participated in the work by being involved in specific parts of the collection work, when he together with CT did some of the interviews, and he also participated in site visits. EH and CT made the report of the project, with assistance of KN which is one of the foundations of this article. All three authors have participated in the re-processing of the collected material for this article. CT and KN did the initial structure of the article, and EH then contributed with empirical and analytical material. All three authors provided with theoretical perspectives and analysis. EH later restructured the article and has had the main responsibility for structuring the analytical points. All three authors have been involved in the work of processing and finalizing the article, and are jointly behind it, including the changes that has been made in revision 1 and revision 2. The article should be regarded as a collaboration in which everyone contributed in roughly equal measure.

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Data availability The collected empirical data can be accessed in the following ways: Access to observations and interviews can be accessed through one of the authors, corresponding author Elisabeth Högdahl and Lund University. They are in Swedish and anonymized. Regarding documents about SafeGrowth's activities, the re-analysis can be accessed through the author Charlotta Thodelius and Borås University. The course material this is based on can be obtained with the permission of the company SafeGrowth, as

they are internal working documents.Material about SafeGrowth's activities can also be accessed via their website, https://www.safegrowth.org/. The report is published at the homepage of The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention: https://bra.se/kunskapsstod/lokalt-och-regionalt-stod/erfarenhetsbank/arkiv/2022-12-19-implementeringen-av-safegrowth-pa-drottninghog.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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