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INVESTIGATING FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF DOGFIGHTING IN THE UK: A RESEARCH NOTE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to discuss financial aspects of illegal dog-fighting in the UK and to reflect upon and discuss the difficulties of researching illegal entrepreneurial activities such as dog-fighting which are operated for criminal profit. Such activities are conducted by urban criminals often in a rural setting. Such crimes invariably occur in a closed social milieu to which the authorities and the academic researcher cannot legitimately gain access. In this case the illegal activities as well as being status and animal welfare crimes can legitimately be regarded as being an entrepreneurial activity as they entail trading in a Kirznerian sense as well as financial implications associated with gambling.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodological approach used in this article is that of desk based research to locate and review academic article in relation to the illegal activity of dog-fighting and to synthesise this knowledge with empirical material gathered from a search of British newspapers on the subject to develop an aperçus in relation to financial aspects of the crime.

Findings – Very little is known about the financial aspects of illegal dog-fighting in the U.K. It is an activity shrouded in secrecy. The primary purpose of the activity is to engage in gaming activities with the intention of making money. This qualifies it as a financial crime.

Originality/value – This article is of value because of its novelty and also because it highlights the difficulties in investigating certain illegal entrepreneurial criminal activities. It is vital to conduct such research because otherwise the subject matter would be ignored by the research community.

Keywords: Criminal entrepreneurship; Dog-fighting; Financial Crime.

Word Count: 5,212

INVESTIGATING FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF DOGFIGHTING IN THE UK: A RESEARCH NOTE

1. INTRODUCTION

Interest in behavioural and financial aspects of criminal entrepreneurship is increasing as evidenced by recent publications in entrepreneurship journals (Smith, 2009; Gottschalk, 2009 / 2010). However, exactly what constitutes an entrepreneurial crime, or what type of criminal can legitimately be regarded as entrepreneurial criminals or criminal entrepreneurs remains largely under researched. This research note considers the crime of dog-fighting as an illegal entrepreneurial crime because it is primarily committed for the purpose of financial gain. Although traditionally treated by the authorities as an animal cruelty issue such activities can legitimately be regarded as criminal entrepreneurship as articulated by Hobbs (1987) because of the gaming and financial elements involved. Yet we know very little about the financial aspects of the crime, particularly in a U.K. context. This research answers the call of Forsyth and Evans (1998: 215) for research to identify the socio-economic micro processes involved in dog-fighting and other related illegal practices. It is difficult to quantify the prevalence of the crime or estimate the amounts of money involved in Britain. To highlight the scale of the problem - according to RSPCA figures there were 284 official reports of dog-fighting in the UK during 2008. Dog-fighting appears to be an organized criminal activity engaged in by urban criminals and particularly by organized thieves and drug dealers. Indeed, this article resulted from an appreciation of the importance of their dogs to many urban criminals. This study is not so much concerned with the history and technicalities of the

outlawed sport but with the economics of dog-fighting (Jackson, 2001) [2]. We now turn to review the literature on dog-fighting.

2. REVIEWING THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON DOG-FIGHTING

As an acknowledged blood sport, dog-fighting is illegal in most Western cultures and entails two contestants encouraging their dogs to fight against each other in a pit. It is an ancient form of gaming now considered by many as outdated and cruel. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 827) define dog-fighting as the act of baiting two dogs against each other for entertainment or gain. It is predominantly an exclusive male sport the participants of whom are invariably of working class extraction. Indeed, the activity is said to encourage traditional masculine characteristics of competitiveness, aggression, strength, toughness and courage all of which are traits associated with enterprising behaviour as well as hegemonic masculinity. Much of the literature on dog-fighting emanates from the United States although there are a few British studies (see for example the works of Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth, 1998; and Forsyth and Evans, 1998). Some of the literature is from sociological and anthropological studies and from the literature of rurality. Much of our knowledge comes from media reports.

2.1. The American literature

The ethnographic study of Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998) examined the issue of dogfighting in relation to rural masculinity and symbolic expression. They interviewed thirty one dogmen, who were predominantly white males of working-class extraction.

Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth argue that as a blood sport, specific elements represent symbolic attempts at attaining and maintaining honor and status, which equates to their perceptions of masculine identity. They further argue that pursuit of symbolic masculinity through dog-fighting is important to working-class men because they possess fewer alternative avenues for achieving status than do middle-class, professional men. This is an important point. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 827) argue that many of the dog-fighting fraternity in America are otherwise law abiding citizens. This does not appear to be the case in Britain in that the protagonists emanate mainly from the criminal classes. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 827) argue that dog-fighting is a symbolic arena for the development, expression and validation of masculinity (as interestingly also is entrepreneurship). Forsyth and Evans (1998) explain how dog-men utilise neutralization theory to rationalize their behaviour to counter stigma and criminal identity in a world becoming increasingly intolerant of dog-fighting. They deny injury; condemn their condemners; appeal to higher loyalties; and position themselves as good people in that their deviance-is expunged by their good character.

Gilmore (1990: 17) argues that in order to belong boys aspire to what their culture demands of them. In the case of the dog-fighting sub-culture they aspire to a socially constructed criminal identity which to them epitomizes their skewed notions of manhood. This is in keeping with the findings of Kellert and Felthous (1985) who linked the incidence of childhood cruelty to animals to an aggressive criminal upbringing with exposure to familial violence, paternal abuse and alcoholism. This would suggest that those who perpetuate cruelty to animals are more likely to come from a traditional criminal background. The research of Forsyth and Evans (1998) also provides insights

into the social construction of reality of individuals who engage in an activity that most people find reprehensible. Forsyth and Evans (1998) argue that as with any criminal / deviant behavior, understanding and subsequent solving of the problem begin with knowledge of the offender's perspective.

2.2. The British literature

In sociological circles it is widely accepted that the British working classes have a long history of being associated with dogs (Jones, 1992; Kirk, 1998) and this affinity extends to the criminal fraternity. Similarly, dog racing is a sport associated with the working classes (Jackson, 2001). Traditionally, in Victorian times dog-fighting and dog-racing were common and a genre of rogues known as ‘Sporting Men’ bet heavily on the outcome, so much so that the term became a euphemism for men from the criminal classes [1].

More recently Evans and Forsyth (1998) reiterated the popularity of dogs in urban working class areas of Britain and Barnes *et al* (2006) suggest that ownership of certain high-risk breeds of dogs can be read as a marker for deviant behaviour in the owner and that choice of dog reflects the personality of the owner. For Barnes *et al* the dog becomes a “*deviant possession*” and a status symbol. Indeed, Podberscek (1994) reported on the pathologisation process in relation to particular breeds of vicious dogs in the media. Particular breeds of dog have become associated with the criminal psyche and indeed now form part of the contemporary criminal aesthetic in that stereotypical urban

criminals are almost expected to own a dog as a status symbol, or for protection purposes [3]. These status dogs tend to be aggressive breeds such as, German Shepherds, Pit-bull terriers, Rottweiler's, Doberman Pinchers, Mastiffs etc, all of which are noted for their ferocity; or racing breeds such as Whippets, Greyhounds or Lurchers bred for speed. To appreciate the interconnectedness of the criminal, his dogs and the countryside it is necessary to briefly discuss the urban criminal and his dog.

2.3. The urban criminal and his dogs

Although this research note is ostensibly about the financial aspects of dogfighting it is necessary to understand the relationship between the urban criminal, his dogs and the countryside and in particular at the related activities of dog-fighting, hare-coursing, badger-baiting and dog theft. These are important related activities in that criminals who engage in dogfighting often engage in these related activities and it is necessary to understand them because to interdict crime it is necessary to read the criminal psyche. Thus if we are to reposition the phenomenon as an economic or financial crime it is necessary to understand the urban criminal at play and appreciate the 'macho' economics of dog-fighting.

There is a sparse academic literature on illegal hare-coursing (White *et al*, 2003) but in the main it relates to the politics of hunting and not to links to serious and organized crime. Hare-coursing is an illegal activity in Britain. In Scotland the sport was outlawed in 2002 and in England in 2004. Prior to then hare-coursing had only loosely been considered an offence under the Wildlife Act (1976) in that one could be prosecuted

for trapping and selling hares for meat. There does not appear to be an academic literature in relation to badger baiting. See table 1 below for a discussion on the related activities.

Table 1 – Exploring linkages between dogfighting and other related criminal activities (Source: author generated)	
Crime Type	Description of activity
Illegal hare-coursing	<p>Hare-coursing is blood sport in which two dog owners release their respective dogs and bet on which dog will catch the hare first. Hare-coursing is defined as “<i>the pursuit of hares using hounds</i>”. It usually occurs at dawn or dusk when there are few witnesses. It is particularly prevalent after harvest time in August to September when the fields are bare. Although hares are faster than dogs over a short distance they do not possess the same stamina over a long distance. As the hare tires one of the dogs inevitably catch the hare and savage it. Traditionally in many circles activities such as hare-coursing were not regarded as being criminal acts by the community and that in policing terms were afforded very low status. Officers attended only when called by landowners and invariably the suspects denied the offence and were sent on their way. The usual excuse was that they were only exercising their dogs. On training forays a pack of dogs will be released against the hare. In actual competitions the two dog owners and any spectator’s place bets on which dog will catch the hare. The activity is often filmed by video camera, or mobile phone, to be used later for staged betting for devotees who cannot be present. Hare-coursing gangs have an intelligence network and knowledge of escape routes and short cuts. They post look outs to give advance warning of police activity. Many gangs travel long distances from urban conurbations to engage in the activity. Suspicious signs include parked vehicles in gateways and convoys of vehicles with transit vans at either end with minders to scare of nosey onlookers. Any farmer who seeks to intervene is usually threatened off by threats of violence, having their farm outbuildings burned, or animals released.</p>
Badger Baiting	<p>Badger-Baiting is blood sport in which the dog owners locate a badger set and use shovels to block off the burrows. They then release their dogs into the set to track down and kill the badgers. They place bets on which dog will make the kill, Often they use their shovels to help dig a path for the dogs to reach the badgers. The exercise is usually filmed for posterity and for betting purposes. It is an organised</p>

	affair where look outs are posted to avoid detection by the authorities.
Dog theft	Where dog-fighting and badger baiting rings operate there is usually reports of dog thefts, either for financial gain or for training purposes. The stolen dogs will be trained (like gladiators) to fight to act as opponents to train top dogs. Breeds which make good fighting dogs are also frequently stolen. There is a lucrative black market.

All the above activities have a connection to the countryside because many organized urban criminals use the countryside in the pursuit of their criminal activities. Indeed, it is a hidden aspect of their *modus operandi* [5]. Thus many urban criminals treat the countryside as a ‘rural playscape’ in which they enact their professional and personal business including illegal hare-coursing and dog-fighting.

2.4. Media reports of dog-fighting

As academics, much of our contemporary knowledge of dog-fighting comes from media reports in newspapers and television documentaries. From such reports we gain up to date intelligence on how prevalent the problem is. Such accounts augment our understanding from the literature. The journalist Gillian Bell (Bell, 2008) remarked on the rise of clandestine and illegal dog-fighting in the north east of Scotland and linked it to underworld drug dealing in Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Macduff, Aberdeen and Dundee all areas noted for their drug problems. Bell reported that amongst the drug dealing fraternity it is seen as a mark of ‘prestige’ to own a top fighting dog or even to be invited to attend. This is a view backed up by the SSPCA. The BBC Panorama programme on dog-fighting filmed in Merseyside and in Northern Ireland asked whether the laws on dog-fighting were failing and unearthed an illegal trade in breeding pit bulls for organised

dog-fighting. The dog-fighting fraternity in Northern Ireland, sell dogs to people in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool and London. The Asian community in Birmingham are reportedly major customers. There is anecdotal evidence of sledgehammer attacks on properties, arson attacks and of extreme violence. This provides clear evidence of the scale of the illegal activity.

In relation to related activities of hare-coursing, newspaper articles indicate that hare-coursing is an increasing problem in rural Britain (Howe, 2007; No author 2009) [4]. Moray, the Buchan area and the Mearns are all frequently targeted by teams of criminals from all over Scotland. An article in the Garstang Courier dated 5/8/2009 claims that illegal hunting with dogs, fox hunting, hare-coursing and badger-baiting are rife in Lancashire and Lincolnshire. We now turn to consider methodological issues.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In Britain because it is illegal to be present at a dog-fight *per se* and as most of the activists are members of the criminal fraternity it is well nigh impossible to conduct qualitative research as in observation or in-depth interviews because of obvious ethical issues. This makes indirect desk research such as internet based searches and / or LexusNexis® searches of newspaper articles on the subject invaluable. Because dog-fighting and associated criminal activities involving gaming such as Badger baiting and hare-coursing are illegal activities they are obviously difficult to research as well as to investigate from a law enforcement perspective. From an academic perspective, this necessitates the usage of an investigative methodological approach whereby the research

picture is drawn from the examination of newspaper articles. It is significant that Forsyth and Evans (1998) also drew on newspaper accounts of dog-fighting as secondary data for just this reason. Consequentially, the research note is based upon desk research into dog-fighting, dog-racing, hare-coursing and associated gaming and gambling practices. The data collected is triangulated by cross referencing various sources. A LexusNexis® search provided supplementary data. There is a lack of serious academic research into such activities because researchers can encounter difficulty in gaining access to respondents and data [6].

4. EXAMINING THE ECONOMICS OF DOG-FIGHTING

There is anecdotal and empirical evidence (particularly in press accounts) to suggest that many of those involved in dog-fighting belong to the criminal fraternity and are organized crime figures such as drug dealers and thieves. This should elevate interest in dog-fighting as a gateway to organized criminal activity. Consequentially, this section examines the socio-economics of dog-fighting as an urban crime problem and also as an Illegal Rural Enterprise (IRE, McElwee, 2009; Smith, 2010). In both instances it concentrates upon the economics of the activities. The economics are reciprocal and need not necessarily be financial. There is an entrepreneurial aspect to the crime in that it involves financial transactions and trading. As such, it is akin to Kirznerian notions of entrepreneurial activity (Kirzner, 1973). Forsyth and Evans (1998) describe the activity as an enterprise in its own right. The events provide a venue for networking opportunities for those socialized into the group. For many it will have been part of their life since boyhood. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 831) in defining the

characteristic of gameness articulated by Jones (1998) as “*an awesome persistence that flows out of an invincible will*” inadvertently posit a viable definition of entrepreneurship. For Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 831) the dogs act as a symbol of the masculine trait of heroism in which the dogs are seen as a reflection of the owners character thus winning dogs equate to a winning personality. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth (1998: 833-834) despite articulating that dogmen are predominantly drawn from the lower socio-economic orders stipulate that a small proportion of them include middle class business owners. Ortiz (2009) articulates that dog-fighting crosses social, racial and economic lines. Both groupings regard dog-fighting as a competitive arena where they can display masculinity and compete with other men for status. Evans, Gauthier and Forsyth found that middle class men regard it as a hobby whilst working class men view it as away of life and as an alternative path towards masculine status. Forsyth and Evans (1998: 213) present evidence from a newspaper account of a raid on a dogfight in Tennessee where 90 people were arrested including one man with \$100,000 in cash. The building was kitted out with food and a liquor bar indicative of it being an entrepreneurial business venture.

The secretive nature of organized ‘dog-fights’ dictate that invariably they are scheduled to take place in secret locations such as derelict buildings, warehouses and farm buildings (O’Meara, 2008). Many dog-fights are organized with mafia like efficiency with look-outs being posted to give advance warning of police activity. Betting on the fights is big business and making money is, as often the case, a major factor in the continuation of dog-fighting (O’Meara, 2008). Indeed, the importance placed on gambling, dog fighting events and the people who take part in them appears to

be organized along a tiered set-up. According to O'Meara, professional dog fighting trainers travel from across the globe to bet on successful fighting dogs. The second tier involves 'hobbyists' at street level fights organised by street gangs. Anderson (1999) highlights the prevalence of such gambling in criminal culture. As well as the contestants putting up a purse money is often gained from admittance fees (Ortiz, 2009). The purse can vary from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Instances of filming the fights for future betting action and also betting online on fights has been unearthed (Ortiz, 2009).

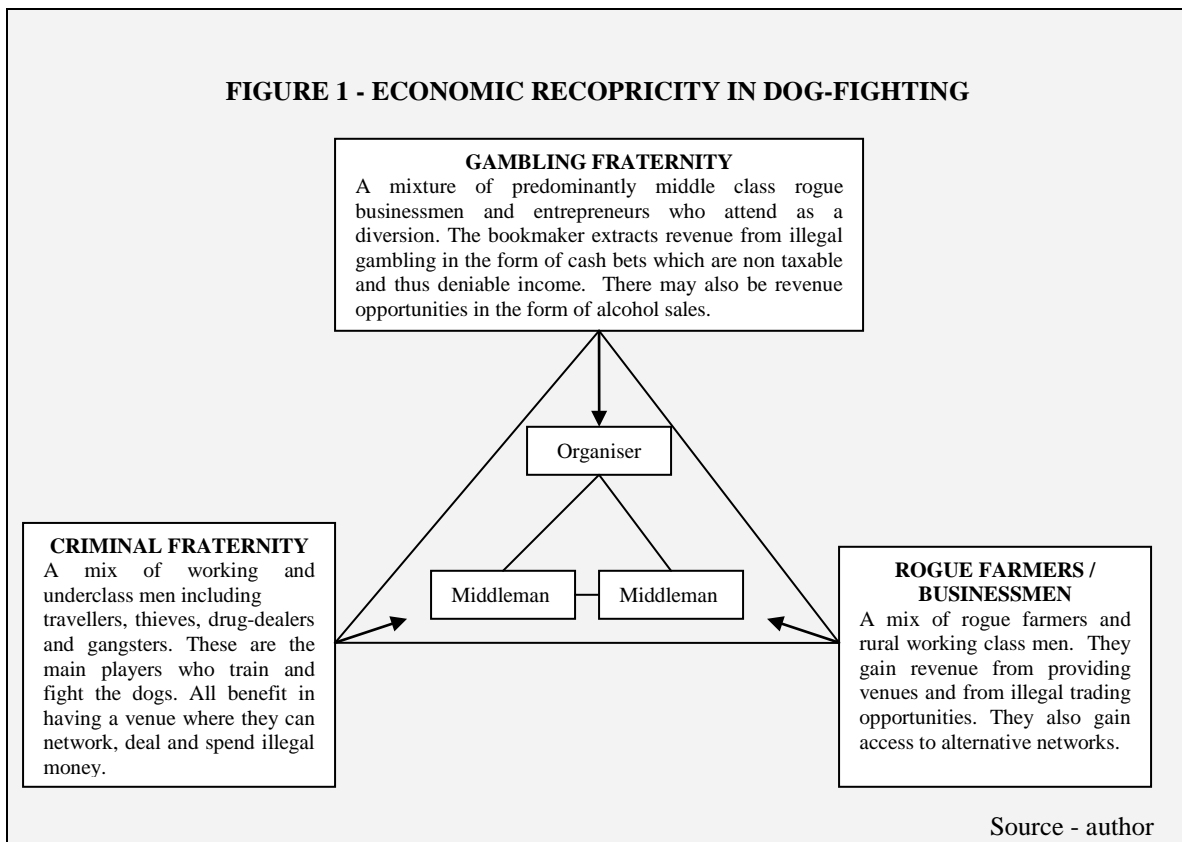
The Venue: Collins and Vamplew (2000: 2) note that an early venue for dog-fighting was often a local public house. However, in practice many dogfights are held in remote rural areas which are within easy travelling distance from of urban criminal areas (Ortiz, 2009). This is because such venues offer participants an increased level of security in that they are hidden from casual police surveillance. A necessary characteristic of such venues is that they require to be hidden from view to passing traffic and require enough space to hide the player's cars from view. For this reason, old industrial warehouses, farm buildings, and barns are preferred which obviously brings the issue of collusion with rogue members of the farming community into play. Nevertheless, dog-fighting venues are just as likely to be located in urban areas in derelict industrial buildings.

The players: These venues are avenues for hedonism and the hedonistic. They allow a 'coming together' of different social classes – the urban and rural working and underclasses with the rough middle classes. These social classes are united in their celebration of hedonism, and deviance in the form of gambling. Thus members of the

travelling fraternity, thieves, drug dealers and gangsters rub shoulders with rogue farmers and businessmen as well as poachers and anyone with an interest in dogfights. All these individuals share a propensity to engage in risk-taking activity. To attend a dogfight is to be seen to belong to an identifiable deviant community where to know and to be known are exploitable as a form of social capital. They are masculine venues where men of a like mind can socialize with the intention of being ostentatious. From a criminal perspective, flash cars, tattoos and 'bling' are very much on display as are rolls of banknotes and 'druggies wedges'. There are opportunities to trade and conduct illegal deals relating to stolen property, contraband cigarettes and alcohol, counterfeit goods and drugs. There is a chance to buy and sell breeding stock and just to see and be seen. There is the issue of 'bragging rights' in relation to winning and being a winner. There is a 'hard man' image associated with dog-fighting and there are claims of people breeding large litters of dogs in order to make money. A dog can fetch as much as £500 - £1,000 and according to O'Meara (2008) Pit Bulls from certain lines are changing hands for several thousands of pounds. Searle (undated) articulates that the activity is usually bank-rolled by a wealthy individual. When investigating financial aspects of dog-fighting it is helpful to look out for physical evidence of dog-fighting as well as evince of book keeping and of arrangements made during the organization of the contest. Thus any tick lists with debts owed or monies taken can prove invaluable. Also trophies are often awarded to winners and photographs are usually taken and shared. These may be on the hard drives of cameras, mobile phones or personal computers.

It is possible to view the dog-fighting scene as an eco-system in which reciprocity is the key idiom. Figure 1 below illustrates the connectivity of the participants and the

reciprocal nature of activity between the gambling fraternity, the criminal fraternity and on occasions rogue farmers. The text contained within the boxes explains the reciprocal nature of the illegal activity.



However, in the absence of data gathered by direct research methods much of what is discussed above must remain tentative.

5. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

There are obviously practical difficulties to be overcome in interdicting dog fighting and the organized criminals involved. The responsibility for interdicting dog-fighting crimes in the UK lie with the Police and with the RSPCA in England and Wales and with the

SSPCA in Scotland and despite a crackdown on organized dog fights during the past few decades the activity continues to proliferate. It is not realistic to expect to completely eradicate the crime due to its embeddness in the criminal fraternity. It is significant that Searle (undated) highlights the lack of training given to police in relation to interdicting dog-fighting. Despite intelligence received the police find it difficult to penetrate such organized criminal activities. Dog-fighting rings are notoriously difficult to penetrate never mind achieve a successful criminal conviction against. There is a need for a more organized approach and for greater sharing of intelligence between agencies. It certainly does not act as a deterrent that the maximum sentence on conviction of dog fighting is a 6-months prison sentence. However, the maximum prison sentence for being convicted of trying to conceal the profits of a dog fighting operation is 5-years. From an academic perspective, this same set of circumstances, make it almost impossible and certainly unethical for researchers to critically research this illegal activity. This makes desk based research into illegal entrepreneurial activity such as this all the more important in bringing such examples into the research gaze.

From a law enforcement perspective, investigating the entrepreneurial and financial aspects of such criminal activity can be problematic especially when the investigation has traditionally focused on the gathering of physical evidence to prove the crime i.e. seizing dogs, training equipment and monies. The fact that it is a crime for anyone to be present may dictate that many accused persons adopt their right to silence to avoid incrimination. This reactive process may dictate that only enough investigation is conducted to prove a case as opposed to conducting proactive inquiries to trace the involvement of all accused. The fact that an organized crime figure is present should

initiate further inquiries. There is scope for being more proactive in attempting to predict the venues of future dog-fights because it is a crime where one can capture and prove a case against several major organized crime figures acting in league together. The involvement of financial crime investigators and asset confiscation officers would be a valuable and welcome innovation. There is also a need for law enforcement agencies to increase the level of cooperation in investigating such crimes and to take cognizance of the financial implications of the activities and for sentences and fines to take this into account.

There is also a need for more funded academic research to be undertaken to better conceptualise and theorise the issues and to understand the scale of the problem. At another level the research note contributes by raising awareness of the activities of urban criminals in the countryside. As an economic activity dog-fighting is about the urban criminal, his dogs and their relationship with both the built urban environment and the countryside. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the countryside is utilised by urban based criminal fraternities as a criminal playscape and that there is a need for investigators to appreciate this.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The term 'Sporting Man' was immortalised in popular culture by the traditional folk song 'The Boston Burglar'. As a euphemism for criminality the term is no longer in usage.

[2] Forsyth and Evans (1998: 203) describe the actual activity as follows. Two dogs are put into a square pit with a referee and the two handlers. The dogs must fight until one is declared a winner. Spectators surround the pit and place bets on which dog will win. The dogs fight until one turns their head and shoulders away. If a turn is called the handlers hold onto them. The dog who made the turn must "scratch" to his opponent by crossing the scratch line drawn in the center of the pit. This must happen within a specified time. If a dog fails to scratch, his opponent is declared the winner. If the scratch is successfully completed, the fight continues. The fight can only end in one of four ways: (a) a dog's failure to scratch; (b) the owner's calling the fight; (c) the death of one or both dogs, or (d) one of the dogs jumping the pit. Failure to scratch is the most common way in which a fight ends. Less common is the death of one of the opponents. The least common ending is a dog's jumping the pit in order to escape the opponent. Often dogs

who escape the pit are culled by their owners as being of weak stock. Ethically it is necessary to describe this process embedded in cruel practices rather than describe it out of context.

[3] The infamous and fictional criminal Bill Sykes a creation of the Victorian author Charles Dickens was fond of his vicious dog and indeed the saying “*a head like a robber’s dog*” is testament to this associational affinity and to the power and perseverance of social constructionism.

[4] An article in the Scotsman dated 9 July 2009 by Michael Howe indicates that Grampian Police and Tayside Police deal with over 90 reports per annum.

[5] In that they bury stolen property, shotguns, firearms and other tools of their trade, money, and / or caches of illegal drugs in rural ‘hides’ known as stashes. Often these are in isolated spots in culverts, drains, derelict buildings and under old bridges or where their cars can be hidden from passing surveillance. In passing through the countryside the criminals can take the opportunity to case vulnerable country houses and businesses as targets for their criminal activities. Often they can operate with impunity because of the lack of rural police patrols and because they are often unknown to the locals. Moreover, many organized criminals / thieves also engage in commercial poaching of deer and salmon for profit. As such they become adept at avoiding police patrols and game-keepers. Intimidation tactics against farmers and game-keepers is not uncommon. Also bear in mind that not all farmers are honest and on occasion knowingly rent outbuildings to criminals on a ‘*no questions asked basis*’! Moreover, many of the guardians of wildlife in the countryside know the urban criminals and an uneasy *modus vivendi* exists between them and the criminals in that if neither disrespects the other directly they ignore the other. However, the relationship is not universally parasitic in that the criminals will use the open fields and rough areas of land to exercise their dogs and for personal pleasure. Active urban criminals also pass through the countryside legitimately on their way to visit friends who live in the countryside.

[6] The subject itself is not one which can be neatly written up as a journal article and also criminal behaviour cannot be packaged neatly into the pre-determined research categories of interest to the research community. Ethical and logistical issues can prevent such research interest from developing into a serious research project as can the increasing pressure to publish quality work in top ranking journals.

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