Beyond the trade off between privacy and security? Individual strategies at the security check

WP 4.2. Exploring citizens attitudes to privacy and security

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Outline of the presentation

- PRISMS and the criminological work package
- The research design
- Themes from the interviews
- Conclusions
- Policy recommendation

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PRISMS and the criminological work package

- Project description

- Criminological work package:
  - Description
  - Goal
  - Contribution to the larger project

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The research design

- Choice of the airport as case study
  - Why?
  - Difficulties: access, data, sample
- Interviews with passengers, airport management and screeners (28 in total)
- Non-participant observations at the security check

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Theme 1: Necessity

The normalisation of security checks:

I agree and I accept and I totally agree that we have to protect ourselves against all kinds of single men or terrorist attacks, that it is necessary for all air travel to be as safe as possible, so I understand that this is a pain we have to go through, but it's sometimes very frustrating. But it's necessary. The security is necessary, I guess. (Int. 1)

Theme 1: Necessity

What about efficiency?

I make sure that no item will cause the intervention of the manual screeners as opposed to the magnetic one [interviewee is referring to WTMD]. I try to make sure that I don't lose any extra time because of that. It's just a time issue. (…) As far as my personal travel is concerned, efficiency is my main concern, but I understand that certain procedures are necessary for additional security. (Int. 3)

The role of technology:

If the right technology was available, it would be great. (…) A screening that even if more thorough would allow me not to have to go through the process of having to take all items outside my pockets. (Int. 3)

Theme 2: efficacy

Uncertainty as to whether, in their current state, regulations actually guarantee and increase security. Does security deliver?

They once took a nail file from me and I don't care. The weird thing is, I had been on five flights with that same file and they took it right before I got on the last plane, which… I didn't care. I can get another file. (…) What bothers me is that apparently it could be a threat and they never took it, so that means that they are not always as strict as they should be, or maybe on the other hand there was this one guy that was too serious about it. That made me feel less secure, knowing that the rules can be applied in different ways. (Int. 2)

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Theme 2: efficacy

The need for more information.

I think if people felt that their contribution to security makes people feel safer, they would be much more helpful. Lots of people are getting annoyed by, for example, having to put everything in a transparent bag and not taking water… If they don't feel that that actually contributes to security. (…) If people could see [statistics], then they would realize that this actually makes sense, to take off your shoes, not to take water. Because now, once in a while, you hear a rumour, like that they are going to lift the ban on liquids, so where does this come from? Is it based on measurables or is it because they feel it is costing too much money? This kind of things. (Interviewee 4).

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Theme 3: proportionality

Are the effort, time and money spent on security justified?

At the end of the day, I think, if the idea is to combat terrorism, no matter what the restrictions are, I think people are going to find a way, because I don't honestly believe that for the time, and money, and effort, and wasted bottles of water… I don't think it's going to deter people, that it is going to avoid, prevent, anything from happening. (Int. 7)

Emphasis on the negative implications in terms of unpleasantness, intimidation, suspicion and discrimination:

It's like they assume that you might be a danger and that's what annoys me. They don't start with the assumption that you are innocent, at least that's the feeling I have. And that's where I feel that it's going too deep. (Int. 4)

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Theme 4: privacy

It's always annoying to pass security. I don't like the body scanner, though it happened to me that they used it in some airports in which I was. In general I don't want that security practices are too invasive in terms of personal privacy. I don't want to be searched if it's not necessary, I don't want them to need to scan my body if it's not necessary. But I know that if you want to fly, it's just part of the game. (Int. 5)

Only three respondents mentioned privacy in the course of the interview: privacy as a non issue?

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Theme 4: privacy

Rather than privacy, lack of choice?

[Interviewee is talking about the body scanner she had to go through on a recent trip to Asia] *I feel like I don't really have a choice. Well, apparently, I do have a choice but I didn't know. You are allowed to say no, but then they will have to pat me down. (...) So the metal detector is fine, but the body scanner I find too intrusive.* (Int. 4)

I don't like the fact that my passport now has an electronic chip. I don't like the idea of biometric data. I guess I have more of a problem with the idea of the data being collected and passing through a scanner, even the other kind where you just pass through, but nothing is recorded and it is not linked directly to my identity. (...). What I really dislike is the idea that there is a big database and they are collecting data and they know all my movements. (Int. 7)

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Conclusions

- The paradox of security

- Normalisation: the case of the body scanner

- Privacy and security: still a trade-off? What are the implications for the larger project?

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Policy recommendation

- Information clearly available as to the why, the how, and the how long of specific measures that are introduced in a given setting.

- Include the opportunity for actual alternatives, and make access to them possible.

- Downplay potential for discomfort and intimidation, particularly in involvement with citizens coming from minority backgrounds.

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Thank you.

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