
Proactive Prevention Programmes as a Tool for Improving Urban Security on the Example of Warsaw in Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article discusses proactive prevention programmes as an example of an effective tool for improving security and revitalizing criminological urban space in the center of Warsaw, Poland. A proactive approach to crime prevention can be important because it involves pre-emptive action to identify potential threats and mitigate them before criminal events occur.

Design/Methodology/Approach: On the example of the author's experience in the preparation and implementation of the innovative prevention programme "SEKTOR" in Warsaw, an attempt was made to examine the relationship between a proactive approach to security management and the effectiveness of this form of action. In addition, the effectiveness resulting from the integration of various types of services responsible for security and public order, local government administration and the private sector was considered. Effective identification of threats and implementation of rapid and accurate interventions are included. In the research process, the focus was primarily on empirical methods, characteristic of the field of social sciences. The theoretical foundations of crime prevention are also taken into account in the context of conclusions from the analysis of the course of activities and innovative human resources management.

Findings: Referring to the results of this study based on a specific prevention programme, attention is drawn to its impact on reducing the level of crime and increasing the sense of security among people in the area where it was implemented. In the context of the analysis of the effectiveness of preventive measures, the article also touches on the role of new technologies that support security management, such as a monitoring system or integrated communication, and enable faster response to events. It was indicated how the use of technological solutions and interinstitutional cooperation translates into real effects in the form of reducing crime and improving the sense of security.

Practical implications: For the effectiveness of proactive prevention, the involvement of local institutions and extensive cooperation with relevant entities operating in the local community is important. The importance of adapting to changing urban and social realities is crucial for maintaining a high level of security in large cities. Proactivity — in practice giving way to "soft" preventive methods — can give immediately visible and lasting effects if the pursuit of improving public security and order is supported by appropriate resources and well-motivated public services in one place and time.

Originality/Value: The author describes the challenges and limitations related to the implementation of proactive actions in the context of changing threats, such as homelessness, drug addiction, pedophilia, prostitution and common crime. The role of education and

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engaging residents in prevention activities was also emphasized, which in the long term can contribute to the creation of more resilient communities. The results of the functioning of the selected prevention programme were analysed, which, due to the use of a proactive approach, differed significantly from classic prevention initiatives carried out, among others, by the Police.

Keywords: *Homeland security, crime prevention, illegal behavior, narcotics, law enforcement.*

JEL codes: *H56, K420, K42.*

Paper type: *Research paper.*

1. Introduction

In modern cities, where urbanisation is accelerating and the population is growing, public security has become a key issue requiring innovative strategies. Warsaw, as a rapidly developing urban area within the European Union, also faces challenges related to crime, the vandalism of public property, and disturbances to public order (TVP Info, 2025).

Both in the West and increasingly in Poland, we can observe the emergence of closed community enclaves, treated as fortresses and transformed into restricted-access zones, even for law enforcement. Migration, the impoverishment of certain social groups, crime, and addiction are just a few examples of the causes behind the development of such “difficult neighbourhoods”. In the United States, such areas are referred to as “no-go zones,” “crime-ridden areas” or “high-risk neighbourhoods” (Monitor, 2017).

Poland is following in the footsteps of Western countries, suggesting that, unfortunately, this phenomenon is likely to intensify here as well. A proactive approach to preventing crime and social pathologies in public spaces is once again becoming a pertinent topic in discussions about effective ways to ensure security and public order.

2. Types of Preventive Programmes

Preventive programmes are based on the premise that prevention is better than cure, and their application in criminal prevention plays a significant role, for example in shaping a safer environment for residents. In this context, a preventive approach not only helps to reduce the number of criminal incidents but also contributes to building a sense of security within local communities.

Police-led preventive programmes are organised actions aimed at preventing crime and other negative social phenomena through education, intervention, or cooperation with various institutions. Their goal is to increase the public's sense of security and to reduce the number of offences (Municipal Police in Bydgoszcz, 2018).

A proactive preventive programme, such as the "SEKTOR" programme implemented in Warsaw in 2005, can be defined as an initiative based on „hard prevention” measures, aimed at permanently reducing crime and pathological phenomena within a specified area. The creators of this particular programme intended that the use of the above-mentioned methods, alongside the launch of multi-faceted preventive actions, would produce added value in the form of lasting change.

Proactivity was understood here as analysing threats stemming from various pathological phenomena and undertaking planned and pre-emptive interventions — made possible by the availability of police, administrative, and educational resources (City of Warsaw Office, 2005).

These activities were simultaneously carried out using the so-called „hot spot policing” method, which, through crime mapping as a tool for visualising and analysing criminal patterns, saturates high-crime areas with increased police presence.

Crime maps show that offences are often not evenly distributed across different locations and tend to cluster in specific areas known as “hot spots.” *Hot spot policing* is a place-based policing strategy aimed at reducing crime by directing increased police resources to areas with concentrated criminal activity. Although still relatively underused, this approach to crime prevention is cited by many criminology experts as one of the key reasons behind the significant drop in crime in New York City over the past two decades (Kelling, 2009; Zimring, 2012; Lazzati and Menichini, 2016, pp. 893-913).

It has now been twenty years since, at the initiative of Deputy Mayor Władysław Stasiak, the Warsaw police began work on developing such an innovative solution. In a sense, it was a police-managed preventive project and, to some extent, a laboratory initiative in which increased resources were used to test coordination of action, new methods of management and communication, as well as to activate stakeholders who had previously avoided taking responsibility for the properties and areas under their oversight.

Within a few months, the effects were spectacular. Even twenty years later, none of the acute problems that had once plagued the sectors covered by the programme's proactive measures have re-emerged to the extent seen in the early 2000s. This part of central Warsaw remains safe and clean (Numbeo, 2025). Unfortunately, signs of change in this situation are becoming apparent. The brutality of offenders in Poland

is increasing, and the number of attacks on women is rising. Local news outlets report that Warsaw's city centre (Śródmieście) is particularly vulnerable to crime. In the first three quarters of 2024 alone, 95 crimes were recorded there, including 11 rapes (TVP3, 2024).

3. The First Proactive Preventive Programme — “SEKTOR”

Proactive criminal prevention is an approach that focuses on pre-emptive actions aimed at preventing crime rather than merely responding to it. It involves identifying risk factors, monitoring potential threats, and implementing interventions to minimise them. A key element of this approach is cooperation between different services, local government administration, and the community.

In academic literature, preventive actions are commonly classified according to their stage and type. Based on this classification, the following categories can be distinguished (Caplan, 1964; Fiebig *et al.*, 2004):

- 1) primary (proactive) preventive actions, which consists of initiatives that are more proactive than reactive,
- 2) secondary prevention, characterised by a higher degree of reactivity (para-active), and directed at individuals who may find themselves in risky situations or are considered at risk,
- 3) tertiary prevention, which includes penal measures and other actions by law enforcement agencies aimed at offenders, victims, locations, and situations after a crime has occurred (Serafin and Parszowski, 2011, pp. 31-39; Urban, 2008).

In practice, the “SEKTOR” programme combined all methodologies of criminal prevention with the hot spot policing method. The decision to launch the programme in Warsaw was inspired by international successes in combating crime and social pathologies. “SEKTOR” had many parallels, particularly with American solutions.

A notable example is CompStat (short for “compare stats”), a police management system developed in April 1994 by Bill Bratton and Jack Maple. Bratton had met Maple while serving as Chief of Transit Police in New York and later hired him as the NYPD's chief crime strategist after becoming Commissioner in 1993.

CompStat involved weekly meetings of police leadership, during which officers were randomly selected from precincts and questioned about crime trends in their districts and how they were addressing them (Smith, 2018). A 2004 study found that 11% of small and 32% of large police departments in the US had adopted CompStat-like programmes.

A follow-up study conducted in 2011 by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) found that 79% of member agencies were using CompStat, and 52% had implemented it between 2006 and 2010 (Didier, 2018, pp. 515-534; Eterno *et al.*,

2006). The programme gained international interest, particularly in the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Mexico. With hindsight, the results of CompStat are subject to mixed assessments. Proponents argue that the system contributed significantly to crime reduction. Critics contend that other cities, using different policing models, also experienced crime drops during the same period (Eterno *et al.*, 2006).

A 2015 report by the Brennan Center for Justice concluded that “stop-and-frisk” practices used within CompStat had little impact on crime reduction in the US, and that the results observed in New York may have been exceptional due to the city's size and unique characteristics (Eisen *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, the Polish national police programme “17 x 5”, launched in 2001, faced criticism for encouraging data manipulation — an accusation also levelled at CompStat (Smith, 2018; Saga, 2001; Pływaczewski, n.d.).

Today, police forces worldwide are also gaining experience with predictive algorithms in the patrol deployment process. In recent years, they have begun to use new approaches to crime prevention and forecasting. Predictive policing, a data-driven method, has been introduced to improve public security and optimise resource allocation. This technology uses the analysis of historical crime data and the identification of patterns to enable law enforcement to forecast potential criminal activity and manage their resources more effectively.

The theory of crime patterns underpins predictive policing methodologies. It assumes that criminal behaviour follows identifiable patterns that can be analysed to forecast future incidents (Marchment & Gill, 2021). Solutions such as PredPol, Risk Terrain Modelling, and Social Network Analysis are considered effective, but controversial (Kar, 2024; Czajkowski, 2019).

Over time, considerable controversy has surrounded these methods, as predictive policing applications are powered by data that is not always accurately interpreted by automated analytical models. There are also widespread concerns about data privacy and the handling of sensitive crime-related information (Czajkowski, 2019).

4. Assumptions and Implementation of the “SEKTOR” Preventive Programme

Warsaw is a city that, on the one hand, enjoys dynamic economic and cultural development, but on the other, grapples with problems related to crime and other threats stemming from intensive urbanisation, social diversity, and a significant number of police vacancies (PAM, 2024). In the capital, various initiatives aimed at improving public security have consistently been undertaken.

These include the implementation of innovative preventive strategies, increasing the number of police officers on the streets by bringing in officers from other parts of

the country, introducing additional paid shifts, and launching targeted prevention projects for specific social and national groups. These programmes not only rely on cooperation between public institutions but also actively engage local communities in efforts to eliminate factors contributing to crime.

Examples include the continuous development of the city's video surveillance system, educational campaigns promoting security, and collaboration with non-governmental organisations. Evaluating the effectiveness and long-term impact of these programmes on residents' quality of life requires an understanding of the context in which they are implemented. Another important aspect is the growing importance of the "smart city" concept in recent years as a model of modern urban development. The use of technology and data to predict threats and manage crises has become the foundation of a proactive approach to security.

The application of modern IT solutions in urban areas — such as data analysis to identify high-risk zones — demonstrates that modern integrated systems can significantly enhance the effectiveness of preventive measures. A proper understanding and implementation of contemporary tools in the context of the specific needs of Warsaw and its residents is therefore a key step towards creating a safe environment. However, moderation is also needed in this respect.

An extreme example of technology being used in urban security is the Social Credit System (SCS), a nationwide project implemented in recent years by Chinese authorities. Both state institutions and private companies have adopted this system, with its most advanced version developed for businesses. By the end of 2019, the Chinese authorities had announced the conclusion of the system's initial implementation and testing phase, making it the first and most consolidated mechanism for assessing social behaviour in the country (Wojciechowska, 2021).

The "SEKTOR" programme discussed in this article is an example not only of a sustainable reduction in crime within the area where it was implemented but also of a technological initiative. It marked the beginning of cooperation between Warsaw's Municipal Monitoring System Department and the Polish State Railways (PKP), leading to the ongoing development of the city's video surveillance network (ZOSM, 2024).

The programme was launched in 2005 at the initiative of the city authorities and the Warsaw Metropolitan Police, with support from the Municipal Guard, Railway Protection Guard, Warsaw Metro Security Service, and the Military Police. It was the first crime prevention project in Poland to be conducted on such a large scale in terms of resources and manpower. It did not assume long-term "soft" interventions aimed at a selected social group. Due to the specificity of the target group, the priority was intensive action aimed at delivering rapid results. The initiative deviated significantly from traditional models of building preventive programmes, though its implementation was based on lessons learned from similar international initiatives.

During the planning stage of the programme, the operational area was defined (a part of Warsaw's Śródmieście district), cooperation was established with programme participants and partner entities, and a threat analysis was carried out. This analysis focused on threats present in the central area of Warsaw, divided between the jurisdictions of Police District Headquarters Warsaw I, the Railway Police Station, and the Warsaw Metro Police Station.

Programme objectives and performance indicators were also defined. Additionally, the results of actions previously undertaken by the City of Warsaw's Security and Crisis Management Office were considered. An essential component of the programme was the proper assessment of available forces and resources, the definition of tactics and tasks, the organisation of command and communication systems, and the planning of programme evaluation and corrective actions for any deviations from the planned objectives. A final step was establishing a system of motivation and oversight for the programme's execution, which, in hindsight, proved to be one of the most critical decisions.

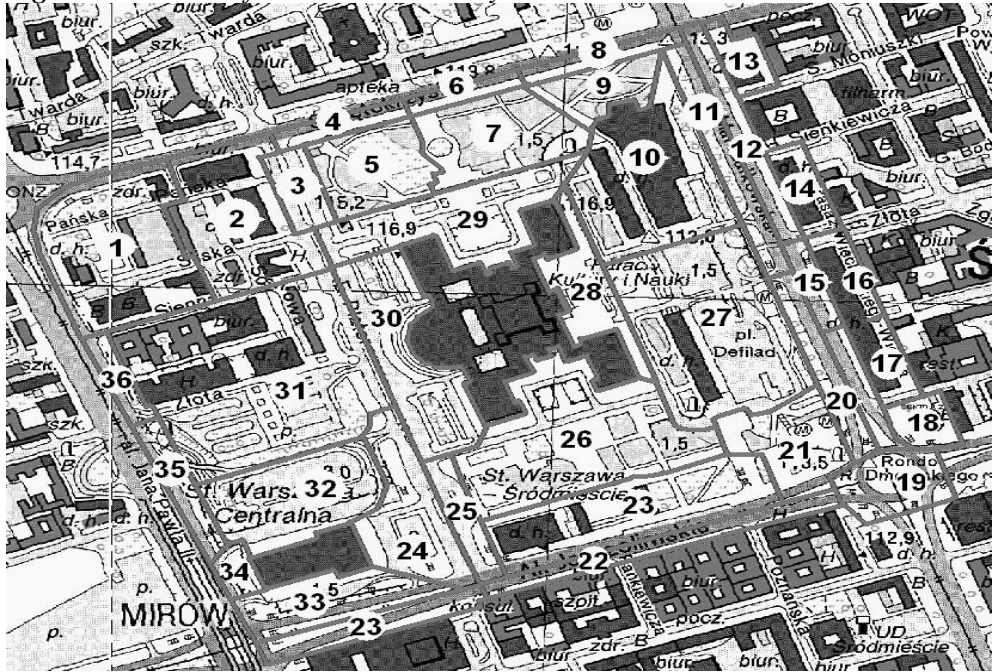
It was generally agreed that the actions undertaken would be intensive and short-term (lasting six months), with no long-term preventive measures. The focus was on rapid goal achievement, large-scale mobilisation of forces and resources, and tactics based on identifying the locations and intensity of pathological phenomena. The aim was to map crime geography and concentrate on reducing the scale of pathological environments by reacting to crimes and misdemeanours (City of Warsaw Office, 2005).

The "SEKTOR" programme was implemented in the city centre of the capital (see Figure 1). This area still possesses characteristics that set it apart from typical urban spaces. On the ground level ("0"), it includes numerous shops, theatres, cinemas, universities, hotels, and other institutions, but practically no registered residents. Below ground level ("-1"), there is a complex network of transport corridors, including railway and metro stations and stops — an ideal setting for maintaining anonymity. At the time, this area had only a handful of city surveillance cameras. The metro and railway CCTV systems were more extensive, but the latter, dating back to 1995, was completely ineffective.

For the purposes of patrol deployment, threat analysis, and operational oversight, the area covered by the programme was divided into 36 sectors. Each could be monitored by a single-person patrol, or sectors could be combined in cases where resources were insufficient to cover the entire area individually.

Based on an analysis of threats present in central Warsaw, a plan of action was developed to reduce the most socially unacceptable criminal and pathological phenomena. It was recognised that Warsaw's railway stations play a significant role in shaping public opinion, both in terms of assessing security and public order in the city, and in influencing the perception of foreigners, including tourists.

Figure 1. *Division of the Area Covered by Preventive Measures into Sectors*



Source: Serafin & Parszowski, 2011.

It was determined that theft, including pickpocketing and luggage theft, robberies, extortion, assaults, and beatings had the greatest impact on the public's sense of security. Furthermore, this area was a key location for individuals involved in drug-related criminal activities. Their actions significantly contributed to the level of crime and public disorder. Changes in the existing infrastructure of this area were also considered.

The main aim of the programme was to reach satisfaction thresholds as defined by specific indicators, namely:

- 1) reduction in the occurrence of pathological phenomena such as drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, etc.,
- 2) significant reduction in common crime within the area covered by the programme,
- 3) undertaking preventive actions towards socially maladjusted youth and children who disrupt public order,
- 4) helping victims, the homeless, and those in need,
- 5) identifying the needs of local communities and shaping public order in accordance with them,
- 6) building the image of the capital as a safe and friendly city for both residents and tourists,
- 7) shaping the level and quality of services provided to residents and tourists in line

- with legal standards and norms,
- 8) identifying issues influencing public perception of central Warsaw as a particularly dangerous area (City of Warsaw Office, 2005).

To summarise, the aim of the programme was to significantly reduce criminal and pathological phenomena through a comprehensive and simultaneous “strike” by preventive services, by “targeting perpetrators”, combining preventive and operational actions of all entities involved in the initiative, focusing operational efforts on detecting perpetrators of robberies, assaults, theft, and drug trafficking, and developing new tactical approaches for uniformed services.

A key component of such efforts is understanding local conditions, which vary depending on the specific location, residents or visitors, social awareness, and engagement of local entrepreneurs. Educating the community, which enables effective threat identification and mobilises residents to actively participate in shaping their security, alongside thoughtful public space design, can significantly reduce areas conducive to crime and social pathologies.

Among the numerous tasks assigned to the forces under the supervision of the programme’s coordinating team were:

- 1) preventing crimes and offences,
- 2) identifying and apprehending offenders,
- 3) preventing vandalism and damage to public infrastructure,
- 4) conducting surveillance on public transport and in operational areas, as well as identifying potential offenders,
- 5) gathering intelligence on criminal and hooligan groups operating in the area,
- 6) understanding methods of committing crimes and conditions conducive to criminal group activities,
- 7) closely investigating the presence of individuals suspected of crimes in high-risk areas or frequenting places associated with drug users and the homeless,
- 8) monitoring high-risk locations with attention to minors at risk of demoralisation,
- 9) monitoring and strictly enforcing administrative and public order regulations in public spaces (City of Warsaw Office, 2005).

A special emphasis was placed on developing a new strategy that had not previously been implemented. This new approach allowed for the utilisation of resources from both participating and previously uninvolved entities. A supervisory team was established to oversee the programme, assess outcomes, and implement recommendations from evaluations.

The team acted as a coordinator and decision-maker, replacing the leadership of the involved institutions. It analysed the scale and geography of crime, set objectives and tasks, assigned responsible entities, and defined and updated necessary resources, tactics, service organisation, the format and method of service briefings,

and the manner of supervision and field inspections. The team also organised monthly briefings open to the media with the participation of stakeholders and invited guests.

Based on its findings, the team prepared proposed amendments to the programme for approval by stakeholders in the form of annexes, established and managed a joint operations centre for all forces, and was responsible for compiling monthly progress reports. The programme allowed the supervisory team to organise targeted operations focused on specific issues using internal and partner resources.

Participating services complemented each other in terms of their powers and competencies. It was decided that the preventive influence of the media (TV, radio, press) should be actively utilised. Journalists were allowed to accompany police and municipal guard patrols and other operations. Actions focused on activating local entities rather than enforcing a “zero tolerance” approach.

Resources were increased by involving numerous stakeholders interested in security in the area and by concentrating efforts using police forces operating beyond standard duties. The operational tactics included identifying locations and intensities of pathological phenomena and mapping the geography of crime to understand correlations, allowing for data-driven deployment of resources.

A major organisational change was assigning one-third of preventive police forces to operate in plain clothes and concentrating available resources on limiting the scale of pathological environments by responding to crimes and offences, implementing special procedures for the homeless, beggars, and at-risk minors. Additionally, accurately tracking incidents within smaller patrol sectors became a new form of increased direct oversight of participating forces. The tactics were adjusted flexibly based on updated threat assessments.

Five key indicators were adopted to assess the programme’s implementation:

- 1) 5% year-on-year reduction in criminal activity after six months,
- 2) 10% increase in the number of arrests for criminal offences,
- 3) 500% increase in the number of fines imposed for specified offences,
- 4) 30% increase in the number of apprehended juveniles reported missing,
- 5) 20% increase in the number of detained wanted persons (Serafin and Parszowski, 2011).

The programme included a unique motivational system. The supervisory team could request financial rewards from the Warsaw Metropolitan Police Commander for outstanding officers and employees. This mainly concerned officers with the highest number of arrests caught in the act, top performers, or those who contributed significantly to improving security in the target area. Another form of reward for participating police officers was the opportunity to work paid overtime, funded by

the City of Warsaw, under a separate agreement. The activities were supported by technology, including a Mobile Monitoring Centre and a CCTV system operated by the Warsaw Monitoring System Operations Unit.

Media policy was implemented via the Press Team of the Warsaw Metropolitan Police, with a permanent representative working closely with city authorities, the supervisory team, and local media. Reports on the programme's implementation were regularly prepared and distributed to participating entities, and results were communicated to the public through the media.

As a result of the six-month operation conducted from mid-February to mid-August 2005, a final briefing with local media presented the cumulative results. Based on these, the programme's effectiveness can now be assessed. The police constituted 76% of the engaged forces, the Municipal Guard – 17%, the Railway Protection Guard – 5%, and the Military Police – 2%. On average, around 2700 officers, soldiers, or guards worked in the area monthly.

The dynamics of reported crimes during the “SEKTOR” programme (year-on-year) were as follows:

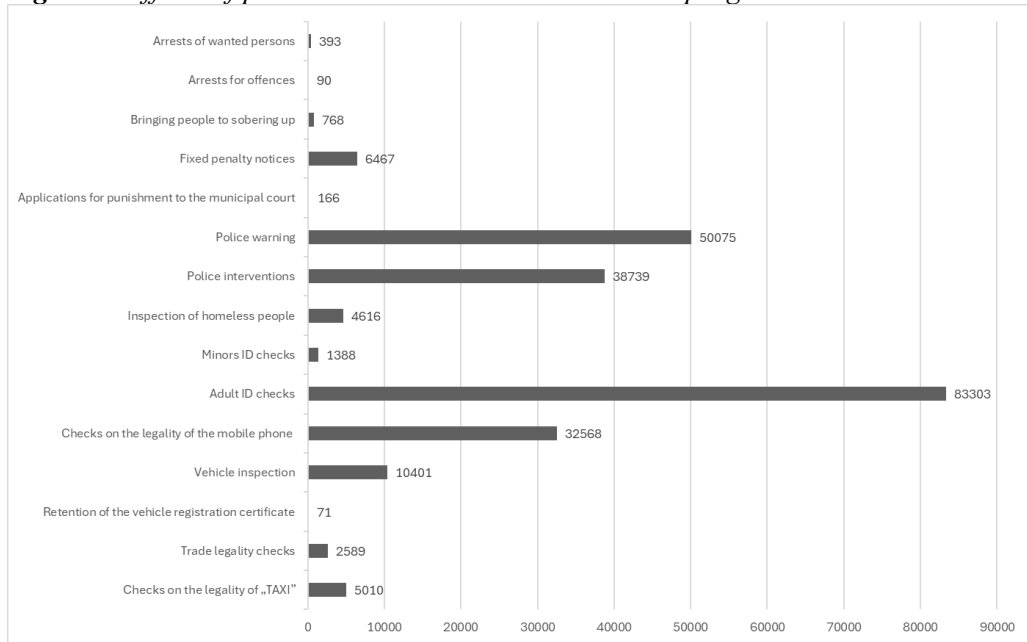
- 1) robbery – 40% decrease,
- 2) theft – 31% decrease,
- 3) car theft – 53% decrease,
- 4) burglary – 26% decrease,
- 5) assault or battery – 12% decrease,
- 6) drug-related offences – 159% increase.

Meanwhile, the dynamics of arrests in selected categories were as follows:

- 1) robbery – 19% increase,
- 2) theft – 63% increase,
- 3) traffic offences – 144% increase,
- 4) drug-related offences – 210% increase,
- 5) property damage – 4% decrease,
- 6) assault and battery – 41% decrease.

The saturation of the area with patrols led to increased response to offences and had a psychological impact. Figure 2 presents a summary of the key outcomes achieved by joint patrols (this information comes from media materials provided by the organizers during the final meeting of the programme).

Figure 2. *Effects of preventive actions in the “SEKTOR” programme*



Source: Serafin and Parszowski, 2011.

The programme enabled the development of new methods of cooperation and unified command over the forces of multiple entities, significantly reducing the level of crime and increasing the detection rate of common offences. During its implementation, multi-agency teams were launched to comprehensively address specific issues, and the media were engaged to enhance the effectiveness of the actions undertaken.

A notable example was the reorganisation of taxi parking areas in front of the railway station, which had previously been controlled by so-called “taxi mafias”. These issues could only be resolved through close collaboration between various bodies that complemented each other’s competencies and mutually motivated one another, thus increasing overall effectiveness.

A representative of the City of Warsaw Office — one of the main coordinators of the programme — stated at a press conference that “security in Warsaw requires coordinated efforts by all forces responsible for maintaining it. This is an obvious principle, but one that is very difficult to implement in practice. Costly challenges related to the integration of communication and security management systems often stand in the way - and, unfortunately, even more so, people and their personalities. In the case of this programme, it was possible to assemble a group of individuals who managed to achieve tangible results” (Łukaszewicz, 2005, p. 235).

5. Conclusion

Proactive preventive programmes in urban areas play a key role in creating safer and more sustainable environments for residents. In densely populated cities like Warsaw, the implementation of such initiatives becomes particularly important due to the complexity of social issues that may pose threats to public security. These programmes often involve measures aimed at preventing crime, improving the quality of life in communities, and fostering civic engagement.

A crucial component of such initiatives is an understanding of local social conditions and cooperation with the resident community, allowing strategies to be tailored to the specific needs of each area. The effectiveness of proactive preventive programmes depends on their ability to engage a variety of stakeholders, including local institutions, NGOs, and the local community itself. In Warsaw, one example of an effective initiative is a programme focused on identifying and analysing crisis situations, as well as taking action to reduce crime and improve the sense of security among residents.

As a result of the implementation of the “SEKTOR” programme, the stated objectives were achieved; however, most importantly, it demonstrated that with sufficient determination and the cooperation of a wide range of stakeholders, reality can be changed permanently. We are now witnessing new threats, and a return to proactive programmes could improve public security and order.

Urban monitoring systems, such as cameras and sensors, can support the work of law enforcement services in enhancing quality of life. The use of technology, combined with community engagement, contributes to the creation of a comprehensive security system that not only responds to existing issues but also prevents them from arising in the future. New threats can now be addressed through a synergy of policing methods, local collaboration, and technology.

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