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Preventive activities as viewed by the inhabitants of towns[1]
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Extended summary

Metodology

On the basis of an RVPPK (Republic's Committee for the Prevention of Criminality) resolution, it was decided in 2002 to carry out sociological research entitled "Inhabitants' sense of security in selected towns in the Czech Republic". The research was undertaken in selected towns that have been implementing the Comprehensive Assistance Program for the Prevention of Criminality at a local level **for more than 5 years**. The aim of the sociological research was on the one hand to ascertain the current feeling of security as experienced by town dwellers (comparison between towns), and on the other to obtain a documentary basis by which to compare the feeling of security experienced by citizens in towns before and after the application of the crime prevention programs (comparison of the situation inside a town). That's why, in addition to matters common to all towns examined, the research also included matters specific to individual towns. This should enable a comparison with previous research projects. The collection of data in the field took place in October and November 2002 in the following twelve towns: Břeclav, Česká Lípa, Karlovy Vary, Karviná, Kopřivnice, Liberec, Most, Nový Jičín, Pardubice, Přerov, Příbram, Teplice.

In all, 6235 respondents were questioned. They were selected on a quota basis. The data groups thus represent inhabitants of the relevant towns over the age of 15; the quota criteria were age, sex and education. Questioning was conducted on a face-to-face basis.

The survey was commissioned on the basis of a public tender to STEM – Středisko empirických výzkumů (the Empirical Survey Centre).

I. Quality of life in the town, security and crime prevention possibilities (joint part)Citizens perceptions of the town in which they live.

In general we can say that the respondents of individual towns did not differ greatly in their evaluation of the situation in their towns; the average evaluation of all questions submitted on a six-level scale (from positive 1 to negative 6) ranged from 2.8 to 3.4 points in all towns.

The overall assessment of the quality of life in a town in the whole group for all towns is a strongly positive assessment. Half the people questioned chose variants 1 or 2 on the six-level scale. Two-fifths assess it neutrally and only 6 % of people are dissatisfied with life in the town.

A positive finding from the research was the fact that (although preventive programs take place in towns with a higher crime index and other socio-pathological phenomena) in no

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[1] Holas, J., Večerka, K. Preventivní aktivity v názorech obyvatel měst. Praha: IKSP, 2004. 102 stran.

town did respondents <u>have a heightened feeling of being in danger</u> (i.e., respondents do not generally tend towards the extreme statement that living in the town means constant danger). A feeling of danger (or, alternatively, security) among respondents is materially linked to the positive or negative <u>evaluation of the atmosphere between citizens</u> in the town. Statistical processing of data indicates that citizens of towns feel good in those towns where they can rely on their fellow citizens, and where there is a general feeling of mutual trust and understanding. Respondents thus share the opinion that one can live well in towns that have this atmosphere.

The following table shows the assessment of various aspects of life in towns for all respondents and respondents from the specific towns investigated.

Table 1
Sequence of towns according to an overall assessment of the situation in those towns on a scale of 1 - 6 in all monitored areas of life and average scores for individual areas

	Kopřivnice	*Nový Jičín*	*Pardubice*	*Břeclav*	*Přerov*	*Liberec*	*Teplice*	*Čes. Lípa*	*Příbram*	*Most*	*Karl. Vary*	*Karviná*	*Average of all*
Shopping network	2.04	1.97	2.19	2.19	2.1	2.2	1.99	2.16	1.97	2.13	2.54	2.53	2.168
Lighting	2.39	2.28	2.43	2.39	2.37	2.57	2.39	2.59	3.09	2.96	2.5	2.96	2.577
Sports facilities	1.94	2.59	2.58	2.51	2.78	2.5	3.11	3.33	2.4	2.67	3.23	2.69	2.694
Health care	2.60	2.56	2.66	2.46	2.77	2.69	2.73	3.06	2.63	2.6	2.91	2.69	2.697
Transport	3.17	2.59	2.5	2.49	2.69	2.81	2.47	3.59	2.41	2.64	2.52	2.94	2.735
Upkeep of homes	2.77	2.20	2.57	2.69	2.5	2.96	2.72	2.84	2.85	3.18	2.89	3.22	2.783
Hygiene	2.59	2.56	2.65	2.83	2.85	3.01	3.13	2.88	3.48	2.4	3.09	3.34	2.901
Culture	2.57	2.70	2.35	3.22	3.41	2.43	2.63	3.34	2.88	3.21	2.97	3.52	2.936
Housing situation	3.74	4.06	3.82	4.19	4.09	3.97	3.58	4.0	4.25	3.43	4.54	4.28	**3.996**
Town administration	2.85	2.91	2.7	2.96	2.99	3.34	2.91	2.78	3.54	3.36	3.52	2.48	3.028
Relations between people	3.0	2.86	3.08	2.97	2.99	3.2	3.34	3.26	3.25	3.39	3.4	3.24	3.165
Environment	2.48	2.52	3.65	2.73	3.26	3.45	3.6	3.06	3.21	3.63	3.17	3.94	3.225
Employment opportunities	4.83	4.76	3.74	4.54	4.74	3.69	4.27	4.1	4.3	5.07	4.15	5.27	**4.455**
Police protection	2.84	2.99	2.94	2.99	3.01	3.41	3.22	3.36	3.53	3.34	3.38	3.14	3.179
Municipal police	2.88	3.27	2.99	3.22	3.13	3.48	3.24	3.4	3.64	3.43	3.41	3.37	3.28

protection													8
Security	2.79	2.9	3.09	3.77	3.31	3.45	3.9	3.13	3.82	3.87	3.61	3.62	3.438
Risk of robbery	3.42	3.81	3.61	4.05	4.15	4.45	4.85	4.1	4.66	4.42	4.47	4.15	**4.178**
Satisfaction with life in the town generally	2.33	2.24	2.3	2.54	2.59	2.41	2.51	2.64	2.65	2.87	2.56	3.04	2.557
Average for town	2.846	2.876	2.881	3.041	3.096	3.112	3.144	3.201	3.253	3.256	3.270	3.357	

Note: The towns are arranged left to right according to the most positive overall satisfaction score. The three most negatively assessed aspects of life in the monitored towns are highlighted in grey.

Among other things, we asked respondents their opinion on how widespread they considered <u>robberies</u> as the most common form of crime in these towns. On this point, respondents in the whole group registered a high level of dissatisfaction, with 46 % considering the situation regarding robbery in the town to be poor. The inhabitants of Příbram provided the most <u>negative</u> result in this respect (64 % chose variants 5 or 6).

A clear positive finding from the research is the <u>improvement in citizens' relation to police units</u>. In not one town monitored by us did the index indicate that the majority of citizens considered the police as inefficient or incapable. In general, we could say that respondents currently assess the work of police (as well as municipal police) with cautious optimism.

The issue of <u>crime and the security</u> of citizens was the second most frequent response to the question "Which problems would you prioritise if you were mayor?" Of the 6 235 respondents who were included in the group of respondents and could name up to 5 problems in the town's life in a free question, 1496, or 24 %, mentioned crime and security. Only the issue of work opportunities and unemployment recorded a higher share.
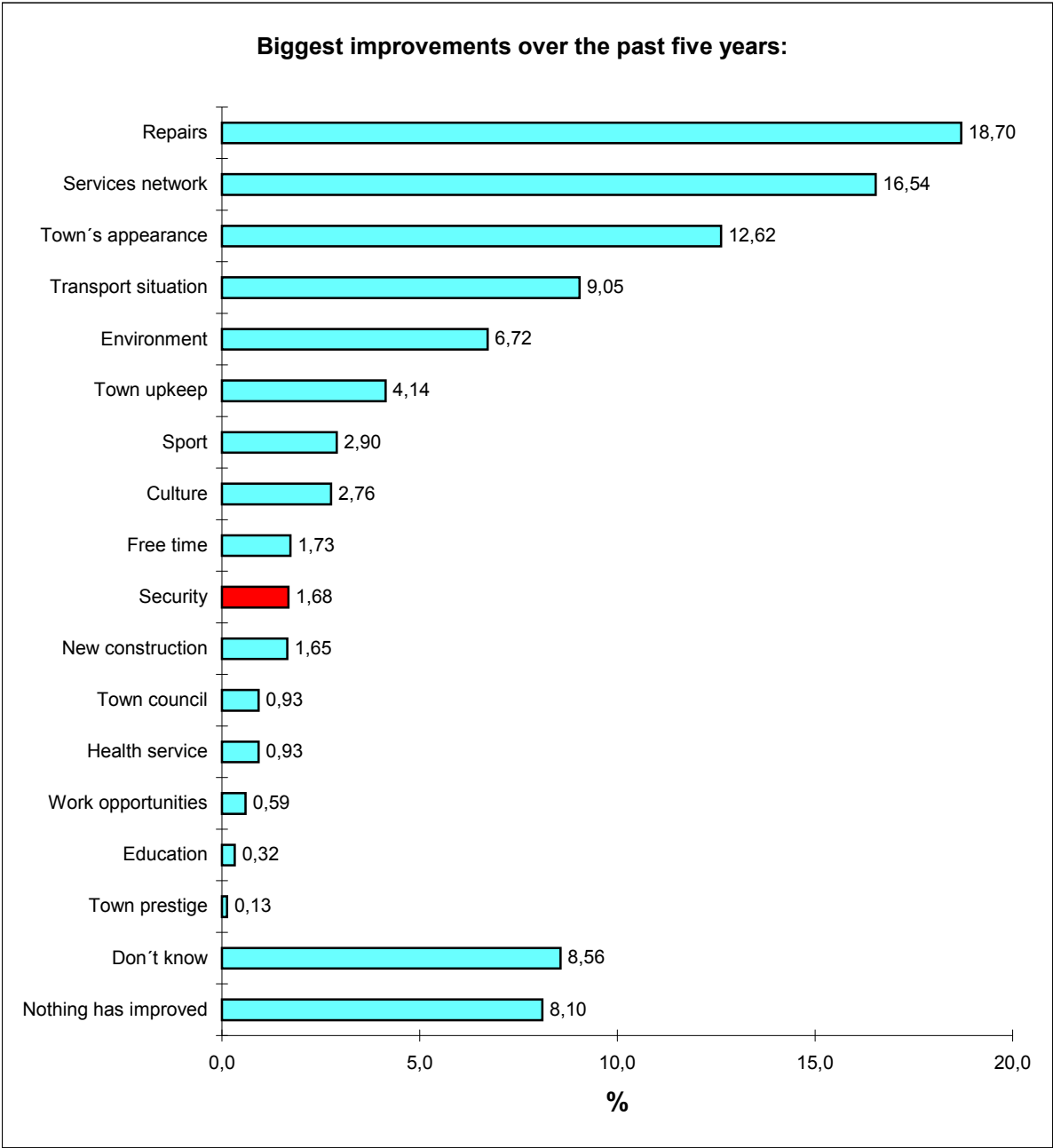
Respondents <u>compared the security situation in their town with that of other towns in the region</u>. Half of the respondents think that the situation in their town is the same as in other towns in their region. Twenty percent believe that it is better. The same amount think that the situation in their town is worse. In all twelve towns, however, the <u>prevailing view</u> is that the security situation is the same as in other parts of the region. The remainder were not able to make such a comparison.

Just over half of the inhabitants of the monitored towns believe that the level of crime in their town has remained <u>as three years ago</u>. The proportion of those who replied that the security situation has deteriorated is slightly higher than those who said it had improved.

An indirect indication of satisfaction in a town is the frequency of people <u>considering moving</u> elsewhere. More than half of the inhabitants of all twelve towns have never considered moving from the town where they live. One third of people have considered it. One tenth of inhabitants are seriously considering moving from the town or have already taken specific steps towards doing so. In this respect, it is interesting that feelings of danger play only a marginal role in the <u>reasons</u> for considering leaving.

The degree of personal involvement in solving the problem of crime was tested chiefly by the question on respondents' <u>willingness to contribute financially</u> to the town's budget for measures designed to improve security. <u>Just under one half</u> of respondents from the monitored

towns (if we can judge from verbal statements) would be willing to pay one percent monthly from their income into the municipal budget. The willingness to contribute is to a large extent dependent on a subjective assessment of a person's own financial and material situation, although this factor is not universally applicable. While the inhabitants of Most, for example, are more likely to describe their households as in financially unfavourable circumstances and are also less willing to contribute to security measures, in Karviná, whose inhabitants assess their financial situation in a comparable way, this relation does not apply.

Dissatisfaction with the security situation in a town does not lead to a greater willingness to contribute to the municipal budget. On the contrary, people who consider their security situation in the town as better than that in other towns in the region are more likely to participate financially in measures designed to improve security.

Biggest improvements over the past five years:

Category	%
Repairs	18,70
Services network	16,54
Town´s appearance	12,62
Transport situation	9,05
Environment	6,72
Town upkeep	4,14
Sport	2,90
Culture	2,76
Free time	1,73
Security	1,68
New construction	1,65
Town council	0,93
Health service	0,93
Work opportunities	0,59
Education	0,32
Town prestige	0,13
Don´t know	8,56
Nothing has improved	8,10

%

The inhabitants of the monitored towns were also asked to assess the suitability of the proposed measures to reduce juvenile crime. There are no significant differences between the

majority of items considered. Respondents consider the most effective to be those activities which seek to <u>fill the free time of young people</u>. Respondents also emphasise the importance of <u>strengthening crime repression elements</u> (more police officers, better equipment). On the other hand, respondents regard educational events and integration programs aimed at Roma as being of minimal importance. **In general we can say that citizens principally identify with methods and aims of crime prevention applied within the relevant comprehensive assistance crime prevention programs at a local level. Even those preventive approaches that attract the "least" support among citizens still have almost 60% of their backing.**

The citizens questioned also gave their opinion on the hypothetical <u>construction of various public service institutions</u> and places of business whose operation might trouble citizens, cause problems or cause concern. The willingness to allow the setting up of an institution in a residential area is an indirect indication of the level of tolerance; moreover, some facilities from the list submitted form part of various preventive projects (Roma centres, anti-drug K-centres etc.). The research showed that respondents are most tolerant of facilities which involve the least element of difference, i.e. that citizens would be least worried by an old peoples' home, police station and church or chapel. On the other hand, <u>greatest resistance</u> is aroused by homes for immigrants or Roma cultural centres. People also have quite strong reservations about the opening of a casino with roulette or a rock club near their home (women have far greater reservations in these cases).

With regard to the <u>age of those questioned,</u> we can say that respondents from the lowest age category (15–29 let) have the most positive attitude towards generally beneficial facilities such as contact centres for drug addicts (more than half would not be worried), homes for the homeless and refuges, and HIV centres, and in relative terms they have the least reservations against a Roma cultural centre (although 47 % would be worried, this is the only age category where the figure is below 50 %). Young respondents are also far more accepting (understandably so) of „leisure" facilities such as casinos, restaurants or rock clubs (this area shows the largest difference between the generations from all submitted facilities). More than 50 % of the youngest respondents would not be troubled by the opening of such a club.

Table 2
Social facilities hypothetically set up in the respondent's residential area (sequence according to tolerance)

Hypothetical facility	Not bothered (%)	Neutral (%)	Bothered (%)	Index
Old peoples' home	87.5	8.9	2.6	2.86
Police station	80.8	14.7	4.6	2.76
Church	77.5	15.8	6.7	2.71
AIDS centre	57.6	27.1	15.3	2.42
Mc Donalds restaurant	55.2	25.0	19.8	2.35
Institute for the mentally ill	49.9	31.3	18.8	2.31
K centre	40.2	32.8	27.0	2.13
Juvenile reform school	38.2	36.2	25.6	2.13
Home for the homeless	22.1	37.5	40.3	1.82
Rock club	26.6	26.1	47.3	1.79
Casino	21.4	29.3	49.3	1.72
Roma cultural centre	19.6	27.3	53.1	1.66
Home for refugees	15.2	30.0	54.8	1.60

Note: The index is construed as a weighted value, where "not bothered" has a value of 3, "neutral" a value of 2 and "bothered" a value of 1

The negative attitude towards immigrants shown by the rejection of a home for refugees is confirmed by the response to the question whether for us <u>immigrants are a benefit or a heterogeneous element</u>. Almost one half of those questioned tend towards the view that immigrants are a heterogeneous element in our country.

Would it bother you if the following were opened in your area:

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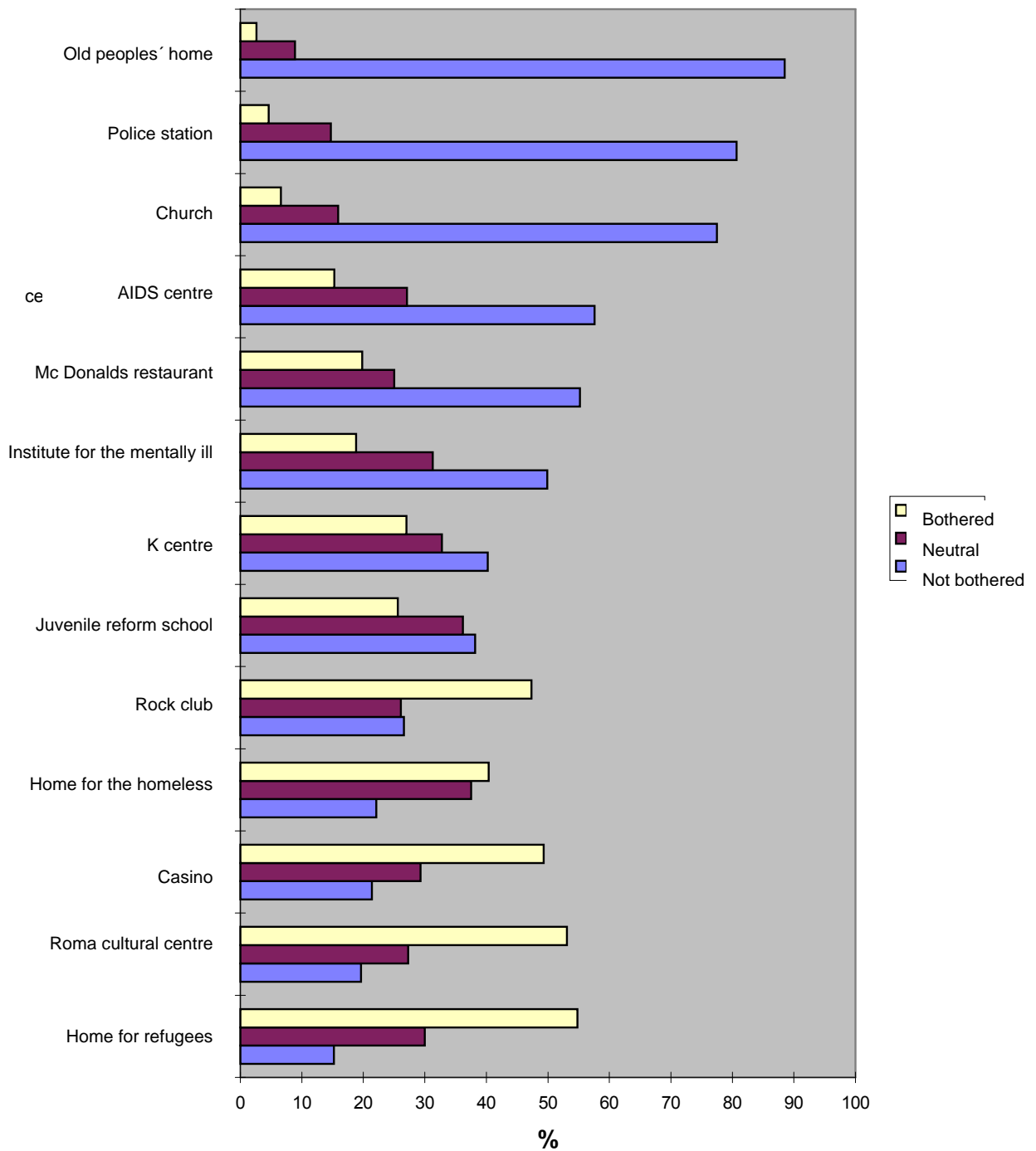
II. Comparison of citizens' sense of security before the launch of the Comprehensive Assistance Program for crime prevention (1996) and after five years of the program's implementation (2002)

In order to become eligible for RVPPK subsidies, individual towns were required to conduct sociological research into the concerns of their citizens concerning crime in the municipality. These findings were intended to focus preventive programs on certain issues, locations, categories of citizen etc. Towns were allocated funds for research purposes and a specimen questionnaire; the actual survey, meaning primarily the selection of a survey agency, was left to the town administrations. However, this approach meant that the implementing companies not only completed the specimen questionnaire according to the wishes of the contracting authority (which would certainly not matter), but also modified the specific questions assigned. The result was a factual discrepancy in the outputs delivered by individual agencies. This shortcoming was extremely evident the second time around.

In comparison with the findings from 1996, the situation with regard to citizens' concerns with respect to crime in 2002 **have improved markedly**. In the mid-1990s, the predominant fear was of violent crime, i.e. murder, robbery, grievous bodily harm and rape. At the beginning of the new millennium these feelings abated somewhat, and respondents now register fewer fears concerning their own safety and the security of their families. There are of course exceptions, for example in Liberec in the mid-1990s there was generally a positive feeling with regard to the fear of crime; now we record a deterioration in all types of monitored crime, while in Karviná people are far more worried about murder.

There were increased fears however concerning pickpockets, a form of crime that still evidently cannot be contained in towns. In some cases, fears have risen somewhat with regard to public disorder and libel.

In relation to five or six years before, most towns record similar or slightly lower levels of anxiety concerning burglary of a person's home and car theft. In general terms we can say that around 50 to 60 % of respondents are worried about these types of crime, and that together with street theft they are the forms of crime about which people are most anxious.

Compared with 1996/7, in 2002, respondents universally register fewer instances where either they or members of their family were victims of crime. Most common were victims of pickpocketing, car theft and bicycle theft. Unfortunately, a more precise comparison of towns is not possible due to discrepancies between the questions asked in the towns concerned (different time spans, inclusion of purely factual crimes committed, or also attempted crime etc.). In very general terms we can say that annually approximately 15 to 20 percent of households in the monitored towns will become victims of crime.

Compared with previously, there was an increase in the number of victims reporting crimes to police bodies. The most commonly reported crimes are burglary and car theft (both over 90 %), or bicycle theft. Instances of pickpocketing are only reported in two-fifths of cases. With some caution we may say that the improved assessment of the police's activities is also reflected in the more frequent reporting of crime.

Conclusion

It is not possible to draw any fundamental conclusions from the data ascertained (in the sense of the greater or lesser effectiveness of funds spent on prevention). There are too many intervening factors involved, such as overall changes in the volume and structure of criminal activity within the state, the economic situation in regions, the role of the mass media etc. In the opinion of the authors, the primary output of preventive efforts in towns should be the awareness of citizens that the town is really addressing crime issues and that it is proceeding in ways with which people can identify. This has been confirmed – all the most commonly used types of preventive program enjoy the support of inhabitants, above all the backing given to free-time activities for children and juveniles. Concerns relating to the most serious forms of crime have fallen, and in comparison with the "wild" 1990s, there has been a gradual reduction in households' experience of crime. More than half of those questioned had never considered leaving their town. People feel that they basically live well in their towns and that life there is not especially dangerous. They are, however, still worried by the high rates of theft.

Following the first "pilot" years we hope that in many towns there is now a common perception that the crime prevention system is an inseparable function of the modern town which cannot be overlooked.