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Prevence kriminality na úrovni obcí a krajů

Crime Prevention on the Level of Communities and Regions

ISBN 978-80-7338-085-4

Summary

The Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention carried out research activities at the suggestion of the National Committee for Crime Prevention and as part of the project “The Current State and Future Prospects of Preventive Work on the Territory of the Regions”. The research activities were executed in 2007 and their objective was to map the structure and forms of preventive work in regions and their communities after the new territorial and administrative division of the Czech Republic. The main objective was to present information about the situation in the area of socially pathological phenomena in communities with extended powers, types of preventive measures applied in a community including a general assessment of its efficiency, conditions of activities in the field of crime prevention and socially pathological phenomena, organisational, material and technical securing of preventive activities in a community, role of particular entities including NGOs and NPOs, cooperation of a region and communities on preventive work and expected aid from governmental institutions. The focused research activities were aimed at regional authorities where they studied various aspects of preconditions for the coordination role of a region in the area of preventive work.

The current survey followed the previous national representative opinion poll regarding issues of safety and crime prevention.¹ Based on the results of this opinion poll it was suggested to inquire about the situation in crime prevention and other objectionable phenomena directly where major part of preventive activities should be done – in communities. We focused on more than 200 communities with extended powers (the so-called “third type communities”) and we aimed questioning concerning preventive work at four groups of persons (experts) who – thanks to the nature of their profession – have the biggest knowledge of the safety situation in the community, existing problems and the used preventive methods. Specifically, the persons included a prevention manager, community police officer (an executive officer or an officer responsible for preventive activities), an officer of the Czech Police (an executive officer or an officer responsible for preventive activities) and an officer of the social affairs department (of municipal or local authorities).

¹ Večerka, K., Holas, J., Tomášek, J., Přesličková, H., Blatníková, Š., *Občané o kriminalitě a prevenci (Citizens on crime and prevention)*. Praha : IKSP 2007. ISBN 978-80-7338-057-1

Based on recommendation of an opinion poll agency the opinion poll was done by an on-line questioning with CATI pre-recruitment.² The final size of the sample was 622 questioned persons.

Alongside this enquiry we carried out another poll focused on implementation of preventive work in all 14 regions. We proceeded with the method of a focused interview and as our respondents we chose officers responsible for crime prevention on the level of regional authorities or those in charge of crime prevention on an ad-hoc basis.³ We focused our attention on establishing preventive work in materials of regional governments, staffing of the position of the regional prevention manager, professional arrangement of preventive work on regional level (including cooperation with communities), the manager's knowledge in the field of complex security analysis of the region, level of cooperation with entities exploitable for prevention within the region, creation of regional projects of crime prevention and cooperation with the national level as well as communities within the region. Last but not least we treated issues of legislative confirmation of prevention.

Some results:

I. Crime prevention in communities – view of experts from local level

Respondents stated the following issues to be the most serious in communities: drug abuse and incidence of drug addicted people, troublemaking Romany people, street disorder and disturbance of the silence of the night, vandalism and spray-painting, problems with persistently unemployed people, people misusing alcohol and gamblers, groups of asocial young people. The questioned experts do not see the following phenomena as major problems (consider them as marginal problems for their communities): prostitution, racist behaviour towards minorities, presence of foreigners without a residence permit, truancy and bullying at schools.

With respect to crime, the experts see the most serious situation in car crime (breaking in cars and car thefts), petty thefts in shops, breaking in weekend houses and breaking in houses and flats. A major problem is also stealing of bicycles, various types of fraud, illegal production of drugs and drug dealing. The experts see the following criminal activities as negligible: human trafficking, animal abuse, incitement to ethnic and racial hatred, sexual abuse, bribery or corruption.

² The questioning was performed by an opinion poll agency Stem Mark based on a public tender.

³ To make this text more consistent we will use a common term „regional prevention manager“ for these officers even if this term is not used for all of them in their regions.

Experts from among state and municipal police officers emphasise the problems with rowdies, vandals, car thieves and burglars while experts from the social sphere highlight the serious nature of such phenomena as truancy, home violence or corruption. There are great differences between communities of various sizes and yet further differences across the regions (e.g. Ústí region deals with production and dealing of drugs while Prague, Central Bohemia and Liberec region have to face car thefts and experts from the Moravia-Silesia region report higher incidence of frauds).

One of the key areas of questioning was the relationship between communities and regions with regard to prevention. Most of our respondents expect their region to ensure an entire range of activities in crime prevention. The strongest agreement was expressed for the role related to direct funding or co-funding of preventive programmes (almost all questioned experts from towns expect this support from their regions), but also in case of many other activities we included in the list the rate of positive responses exceeded the level of 90% (it was e.g. a coordination, educational, information or advisory function). An exception to this trend was the management activity; only about one half of respondents expect this activity from the regional authority. The same proportion of respondents stated that their region was providing the activities in question.

When evaluating whether or not the region ensures particular activities the decisive factor was whether the community itself was dealing with prevention. The poll indicated that if the respondent operated in a community, which thoroughly deals with prevention, he/she more often deemed that the region was ensuring particular activities in the field of crime prevention. This might imply that with regard to crime prevention the regions currently cover the demand of those communities that are themselves significantly active in crime prevention.

One part of the questionnaire was determined only for respondents who perform the office of the crime prevention manager in communities and towns. The poll indicated differences among these respondents with regard to how much time of their workload they could devote to prevention. Only a small part of managers stated that prevention was their sole stock of work (prevention makes up 100% of their workload). However, one of ten respondents can devote only about one tenth of their work time to prevention.

Most communities have a crime prevention committee. Most often it comprises the Czech Police, officers of the municipal police, and more than one half of the committees include staff of the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children (OSPOD) or education workers.

A slight majority of respondents state they have very good or rather good opportunities to gather information about negative social phenomena in their community or town. More than one half of communities have a range of cooperating jobs that are closely related to preventive work. It is namely a worker for primary prevention at schools, an anti-drug coordinator and a consultant for Romany issues.

The respondents agreed that the most important information role with regard to prevention is assigned to municipal and state police, municipal authority, children and youth clubs and organisations and elementary schools. The prevention workers are satisfied with information provided by these entities. Issues concerning prevention are sought after especially by authorities of larger towns that are more heavily burdened by crime.

The poll thoroughly inspected cooperation of prevention workers with non-governmental non-profit organisations. The best cooperation was mentioned for organisations that deal with youth and work with seniors. However, in some communities the questioned prevention workers miss a more intensive cooperation with organisations that are focused on youth with behavioural problems or endangered by socially pathological phenomena, and with organisations that specialise in serious problems in prevention of drug or alcohol addiction or provide services for users of these substances. Roughly one third of the questioned communities dispose of these organisations on a good level; two thirds of communities complain of lack of these services in the area of prevention.

II. Attitudes of regional managers of crime prevention to preventive work within regions.

Since the new regional arrangement of the territory of the Czech Republic crime prevention on the territory of regions has been assigned to the competence of regions. This fact created new conditions for preventive work and made the regions face new tasks. Our poll attempted to map the situation at the end of 2007 in Prague and in all new regions of the Czech Republic.

We proceeded with the method of a focused interview and as our respondents we chose officers responsible for crime prevention on the level of regional authorities or those in charge of crime prevention on an ad-hoc basis.⁴ In total we approached 14 regional prevention managers.

⁴ To make this text more consistent we will use a common term „regional prevention manager“ for these officers even if this term is not used for all of them in their regions.

A. Establishing preventive work in regional government – materials, committees, funds

All regions had a document dealing with the planned development of the region. Some documents are outlined with a relatively long time horizon (e.g. till 2020) while other have a nature of short-term strategies. These documents contain some reference to crime and socially pathological phenomena on the territory of the region (including prevention). However, these excerpts are mostly marginal and on the level of mere proclamations.

Conceptual materials of a preventive nature that do not have an immediate relation to subsidies from the central level are usually not included in the agenda of regional councils or assemblies.

Only 4 regions had a special committee for preventive work. The activity of this committee was substituted by various entities on the level of regions, mostly the Regional Anti-drug Committee or a committee for ethnic minorities. The non-existence of a committee for preventive work reflected the uncertainty in what should actually be the workload of such a committee on the regional level because issues related to prevention should primarily be resolved on the level of communities. This uncertainty further explains why during the poll there was no pressure on establishing a regional committee for prevention of crime and socially pathological phenomena.

Development of preventive work on the level of regions largely depends on the planned finances for these problems. In most regions the sum for prevention of crime and socially pathological phenomena was not exactly (or at all) specified. It was generally stated that the financial situation concerning the support of prevention on the level of region has a permanently low but towards the future slightly improving level.

B. Staffing of the position of coordinator, manager

In each region there was a worker who was (formally or informally) in charge of crime prevention; however, the scope of his/her workload dealing with crime prevention differed. Only two regions had a full-time regional prevention manager; this office was most frequently connected with the office of a regional anti-drug coordinator or it was performed as one of many activities of the department of social affairs and health. At the end of 2007 the actually existing and approved office of a prevention manager in self-governing authorities of a region was established only in half of the regions.

The workers usually performed assistant positions and were not provided with any decision powers. The description of their job was not exactly focused on the work of a prevention manager; it was conceived in a rather general and vague manner. Their common position limited them also in view of the possibility to receive above standard (but sometimes even basic) documents for their job of a worker in the area of prevention.

The survey showed that in 2007 no special qualification pre-conditions were established in any region for the position of a prevention manager. During the interview the managers expressed their internal need to be further educated in the field; however, the respondents did not agree on what this education should be based on. Regions as such did not have major ambitions in the area of dealing with crime and socially pathological phenomena. Better integration of the prevention manager within the structure of regional authorities – ideally in the structure of the Mayor’s office – might significantly improve this situation. In order to view the position of a regional manager as a “promising job” this position should be established in legislation alongside the Romany and anti-drug coordinator with delegated powers (and with a governmental grant). Then the regional prevention manager would no more be perceived as a certain redundant luxury within the regional authority.

C. Professional securing of preventive work on regional level; cooperation with communities

Regional prevention managers kept rather irregular random contacts with prevention managers in communities; contacts were largely done by phone or email. Some regional managers attempted to create a certain information mail portal in order to publish everything that prevention managers on the level of communities might use for their work. The contacts were prevailingly of an instrumental nature. Roughly one half of regional prevention managers tried to organise meetings of community managers. The success of these events depended mainly on the attitude of particular communities towards the regional authority and its activities – the communities emphasised their autonomy.

The survey showed certain reserves in cooperation between regional and local managers; regional prevention managers were not members of any prevention committees in “third-type” communities of the region and they were only exceptionally invited to these meetings (based on informal relations). We can state that so far communities did not express a great interest in involving regions in local problems and likewise the regions do not make an “excessive” effort to change the situation. In 2007 the system was not set for the regions to need communities in preventive work, or for the communities to need the regions.

D. Managers' knowledge in the area of complex safety analysis of the region

Regional prevention managers lacked a more comprehensive account on the situation in the region but they also recognised the need to know these data. In principle they knew there were some analytical materials of the Czech Police about crime in their region, but they did not have an automatic access to these materials and had to demand them from the regional management whenever they needed them. Managers were informed about the current situation in the region in a rather superficial manner and with a significant time delay. The survey indicated that disposal of necessary materials largely depended on the initiative of each prevention manager.

The situation of 2007 confirmed that in the last several years some sort of a sociological survey usable for prevention took place in roughly one third of regions. However, prevention managers in regions mostly depend on public information sources (Internet) or random information from sources like the prevention department of the Ministry of Interior, Probation and Mediation Service, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports or professional institutions with national scope (Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention).

E. The level of cooperation with entities exploitable for prevention

Apart from other things our survey implied that prevention managers on the level of regions were in the initial stage of developing their own networks of collaborating with governmental and non-governmental institutions and were in the stage of looking for their consulting teams. If there was some "network" of collaborating organisations, it was informal and occasional rather than systematic and permanent.

Regional managers more often cooperated with governmental organisations that have a regional reach. In this regard managers mentioned bodies of the Czech Police, Probation and Mediation Service, but also organisations whose reach exceeded the boundaries of a region. However, cooperation was not based on any systematic approach and derived from personal initiative. This applies also to cooperation with authorities involved in protection of law – i.e. courts and prosecution.

A similar situation was noted within regional authorities. Generally we can say that in most regions other departments of regional authorities in principle did not reject cooperation with the regional prevention manager, but they did not seek it either. Individual departments lived

their life without much interaction. Again, exchange of information within regional authorities derived from personal contacts of the manager with other officers. Therefore it was vulnerably dependent on personal positive relations with specific persons working on various positions of a given regional authority.

F. Crime prevention projects

We noted a certain ambiguity in understanding preventive work in regions. Certain financial resources flowed for various projects in regions; some – according to respondents – were more or less preventively focused, but as a whole these projects were not directly presented as preventive projects, i.e. they did not draw funds reserved solely for this purpose. Respondents almost unanimously agreed in that the sums expended annually by the regional authority for preventive work were incomparably lower than funds invested e.g. in support of sports or culture.

G. Cooperation with national level and on the level of regions; legislative recommendations

The emerging work of managers in particular regions requires a certain systematic aid from the central level and a frequent and comprehensive exchange of information among regional managers. Our respondents met on horizontal level approximately twice a year. Nevertheless, their debates had no fixed rhythm or strategic orientation. They had to rely on an informal initiative of some of the regional managers who voluntarily took over the organisational management of such a meeting. Besides these ad hoc informal meetings regional managers kept frequent contacts by phone and email, thus discussing various experience and problems of their work.

A more systematic cooperation among regions was somewhat disturbed by frequent fluctuation of human resources on the position of a regional prevention manager. Unfortunately, the status and financial remuneration of the regional prevention manager were not stimulating enough to make workers in particular regions perform the work in a long term and a goal-directed manner so that they could achieve adequately phased conceptual plans.

Regional managers expected too much from their contacts with the Crime Prevention Department of the Ministry of Interior. They said they were finding understanding for their problems and a lot of well-founded systematic advice here. But in spite of this positive

evaluation managers had some comments on the central level; dealing with these comments might contribute to an overall development of preventive work in regions in the future.

Regional prevention managers wanted the central government to more frequently and thoroughly negotiate with the regional political management and ensure a better position for implementation of preventive plans.

Regional prevention managers would appreciate if preventive work aimed at crime and the related socially pathological phenomena were regulated by some comprehensive statutory rules of law. A law would better establish the position of managers within the system of prevention, might define powers, tasks and areas of responsibility of various preventive workers on different levels of state administration and in different areas of preventive activity. A statutory backing would be positive especially in relation to communities. A clear division of work and competences would – in their view – certainly contribute to better efficiency of the activity and prevent excessive haggling about who is responsible for performing especially unpopular activities. There would also be higher efficiency in the adopted measures. Last but not least the law should define rights and duties of the prevention manager. When creating this rule of law the lawmakers should utilise the plentiful pieces of knowledge of people from the field, practitioners on the level of the region and communities and ensure that this rule of law was not run “on a shoe-string”.

Translated by: I.T.C – Jan Žižka

