

CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. A HUMAN SECURITY MODEL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ORDER

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Abstract

Preventing crime and criminality is essential for ensuring human security, as it is closely linked to freedom from fear, deprivation, and human dignity. The article proposes a social model based on community involvement in crime prevention, not as a transfer of responsibility from the state to the community, but as a functional partnership between authorities and citizens. In this regard, three levels of prevention are identified: primary (general prevention through social policies and education), secondary (intervention with at-risk groups), and tertiary (working with known offenders). Thus, the active role of law enforcement institutions is emphasized, especially through the community policing model, but also the need for inter-institutional cooperation and regulated civic participation, in order to avoid excesses or isolation. Measures such as educational programs, public awareness campaigns, and direct or indirect strategies to reduce crime are recommended. The proposed social model of human security emphasizes proactive action and the building of a strong civic and community culture.

The paper proposes a reconceptualization of crime prevention through the adoption of a social model centered on community involvement as an essential element of human security. In a context marked by the increasing complexity of crime and the limitations of punitive approaches, it is necessary to move from reaction to prevention, in an active partnership between state institutions and citizens. The paper seeks to highlight the need for inter-institutional cooperation and regulated community participation in order to strengthen local democracy and increase the effectiveness of public safety measures.

Keywords: human security; prevention; crime; community; social model; criminal phenomenon

Introduction

In the context of major social and political changes, instability, and imbalances with multiple causes, crime prevention and control cannot be avoided, regardless of how many difficulties may arise. The stage we are experiencing can be characterized as a veritable revolution, because real transformations in society change both institutions and technologies, leading to the disintegration and reorganization of the components of society. We are currently witnessing an accelerated reconfiguration of traditional roles, in a context where the world is undergoing a continuous process of profound, sometimes dramatic and irreversible transformation.

Crime prevention requires, first and foremost, anticipating and preventing the first occurrence of the actions or inactions that society considers harmful to its values and to its

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normal evolution towards progress¹. Crime prevention is a coherent set of social, cultural, economic, political, administrative, and legal measures designed to reduce or contribute to reducing crime, the damage it causes, and citizens' feelings of insecurity through direct interventions to prevent criminal activities, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, through policies and interventions designed to reduce the potential for crime and the underlying causes of crime.

Crime prevention is certainly an essential and real dimension of human security, as it directly affects freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the ability or opportunity of individuals to live and lead a life in dignity. The issue of crime prevention has been and remains one of the most persistent challenges of contemporary, modern and developed societies. Although law enforcement has traditionally been the exclusive responsibility of state institutions, particularly the police, social changes, the increasing complexity of forms and manifestations of crime, and the proven limitations or repeated failures of exclusively punitive interventions or measures have led to the need for a profound reconsideration of the paradigms of intervention and response.

The reconceptualization of crime prevention as a dimension of human security must also be understood in the broader European context, where public order is regarded as a central pillar of both security and governance. As highlighted in Dragomir's comprehensive study on public order in the European Union, the mechanisms of security and public order are not confined to the national level but are integrated into a supranational framework that emphasizes cooperation, resilience, and the protection of fundamental rights². Over the past decade, the idea that crime prevention can no longer be effective without active, constant, and sustained community involvement has become increasingly prominent. Such an approach does not involve transferring responsibility from the authorities to citizens, but rather creating and building a fair and functional partnership between state structures and civil society/the community, with a view to identifying risks early on and implementing sustainable and effective solutions.

Therefore, community involvement in crime prevention and control has become a topic of great interest in recent years, both among the general public and among theorists and decision-makers in structures with powers and responsibilities in law enforcement and application. Although this concept is not new, in the current context it has taken on new circumstances of particular significance. For the first time, there is a marked trend toward massive citizen involvement in an area that was previously considered the exclusive domain of the state. Of course, it is unrealistic to aspire to and believe in the impossible, i.e., a crime-free society, a goal too often attributed to the criminal justice system, but it is absolutely necessary for the entire community to understand what the problem of crime prevention and control really consists of and what are the ways and means by which it can be involved in this process.

Even if they are formulated in different ways, essentially, the role of law enforcement agencies is the same everywhere: *to prevent and combat crime of all kinds*. In situations where this cannot be achieved and where there is an increase in crime, with objectives not being met, the authority of the state is challenged and criminalized, and the arm of the law becomes the target of criticism from all sides. Faced with such challenges, law enforcement agencies reconsider and reanalyse the means of achieving the objectives of preventing and eradicating crime and hope to cope with the situation by adopting new methods, means, and

¹ Gheorghe Nistoreanu, Costică Păun, *Criminology*, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 249

² Andreea Dragomir, *Public Order in the European Union*, Lucian Blaga University Press, Sibiu, 2020, p. 52

techniques, thus assuming the risk of growing dissatisfaction with their activities. At the same time, it is recognized that crime prevention, if left to the exclusive competence of state institutions, is an objective that will be achieved only to a limited extent, beyond their capabilities.

The Role and the Importance of State Agencies in Crime Control and Ensuring Human Security

All debates on the role of the state in crime prevention invariably commence with the topic of “crime control”. From the perspective of those who raise this issue, all other activities of state institutions are not only considered or perceived as secondary, but also represent potentially dangerous and counterproductive actions that sometimes divert or distract attention from the fulfilment of their fundamental mission. Crime control has this status for three reasons:

a. Crime control is perceived as an urgent and necessary social task, which seems to have become increasingly important over time, fuelled and sustained by the belief that the state, through its law enforcement agencies, could achieve results in reducing crime and gaining the trust of the population. The threat that, at some point, crime could become uncontrollable and spiral out of control if the state and the police neglected or changed their traditional duties has led to the acceptance of standard budgeting levels, as well as to reservations about proposals to change and reform the functioning and operation of police departments.

According to Philippe Moreau Defruges¹ there are three generally applicable factors that explain contemporary phenomena of domestic and international crime, as follows:

- westernization of the world, respectively the radical deformation of traditional structures, such as family, community, school, opening of borders, accompanied by the abandonment of traditions, morals, customs, and myths.
- the huge explosion of flows of goods, services, capital, information, images, and people, exploited by organized crime.
- the ambiguity of the state’s response, which does not know how to respond to the first two factors, creating vulnerabilities in the face of crime.

Furthermore, contemporary criminological theories underscore several significant analytical and intervention frameworks. **Routine Activity Theory** posits that crime emerges from the convergence of three key elements: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Likewise, the **Problem-Oriented Policing** approach emphasizes the identification and examination of the underlying causes of criminal behavior, enabling proactive and context-sensitive law enforcement strategies. Additionally, analytical tools such as **crime mapping** and **hot spots policing** play a crucial role in the efficient allocation of resources, thereby contributing to crime reduction in high-risk areas.

b. The police institution, based on how it is constituted, organized, and managed, seems perfectly suited to respond to and resolve social problems related to crime. However, the police do not have a monopoly on virtue, as they are only one link in the chain created by the state and society to protect against crime and ensure human security². Both the police and the communities they serve perceive, through the lens of laws that punish crime, the ability to counteract and immobilize criminals as the most powerful tool in the fight against this

¹ French political scientist and diplomat, researcher specializing in international relations, politician with pro-European thinking

² Costica Voicu, *Interpretations from me, the Romanian Police, and the shock of the present*, Universul Juridic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 197

scourge. Police officers are the only ones who have the necessary qualifications to use this power: they are organized to monitor crime and to mobilize immediately at the request of those who are witnesses or victims of a criminal act. They are specially trained to identify when action is needed and when to use force to compel those who break the law to submit to its rigors. Everywhere in the world, the police are appreciated and evaluated based on their performance as agents of social change, but also on their ability to manage chaos.

c. Crime control is the goal that most strongly attracts and motivates law enforcement officers themselves. A significant number of police officers say they chose this career to be part of the “blue uniform” category and to actively contribute to protecting citizens from criminal acts. The psychological aspects on which their professional training focuses are related to the ability to defuse situations in which the aggressiveness of offenders may be uncontrollable and the ability to make arrests without the use of force. As a result, an organizational culture has been created in which the fight against crime is considered not only the most important activity, but also the most honourable and notable mission.

However, the definition of the concept of “community control” remains disputed, as there is no clear consensus in this area. The meaning of this term depends largely on the theoretical perspective adopted and the specifics of the subject being investigated or researched. Thus, definitions range from the idea of total control exercised by an organization over the community to the opposite notion, namely the community’s ability to influence and control the organization’s activities. This conceptual diversity highlights the complexity of the dynamics between institutions and the community in the process of social governance.

These dominant factors have, in the past, established the fight against crime as the most predominant, if not exclusive, purpose of a police unit. However, in recent times, other new forces have begun to erode the theory that only the fight against crime is important or represents the only way to use police facilities for the benefit and interests of the community. The reactive approach to crime control does, however, have some crime prevention effects. If analysed from the perspective of the measures and penalties applied, the reactive approach suggests that a certain degree of crime control certainly has positive effects in preventing crime.

Similarly, the prospect of imprisonment can be seen as a way of preventing offenders from committing criminal acts, especially if their conviction and punishment are successful. If we accept the idea that criminal sanctions imposed as a result of conviction can be seen as a means of convincing offenders that there are other, more appropriate ways of living, and also of educating them in this spirit, the current approach to crime control can become a solid basis for effective crime prevention.

Insufficient community participation often results from, and is a consequence of, the isolation of the police from the communities they are supposed to serve. This detachment can lead to inappropriate behaviour on the part of law enforcement that is detrimental to democratic principles and the well-being of citizens.

Appropriate levels of community participation result from the implementation of crime prevention strategies and involvement in police decision-making, which serves the best interests of both the police and citizens.

Excessive community participation results from intense power struggles between competing power groups, which will lead to discriminatory practices, corruption, and inefficiency in police structures¹.

¹ Pamela Mayhal, Thomas Barker, Ronald Hunter, *Police-Community Relations and Administration of Justice, Fourth Edition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995

From a methodological standpoint, these concepts may be analyzed through a mixed-methods design that integrates qualitative techniques, such as interviews and case studies, with quantitative instruments, including surveys and official statistical data. Relevant indicators encompass levels of public trust in the police, the frequency of disciplinary complaints, the extent of participation in public consultations, recidivism rates, and the incidence of crime in areas where situational measures are implemented. In this manner, the theoretical assumptions, that insufficient participation facilitates abuses, adequate participation strengthens democratic governance, and excessive participation generates corruption, can be empirically examined and substantiated through concrete data.

Although crime prevention has been designated as the primary objective of criminal policy, it has remained a relatively vague concept, insufficiently grounded from a theoretical point of view. Most approaches provide references in terms of the objectives to be achieved and clarify conceptual terms to a very small extent. In the strict sense, prevention mainly targets those behaviours that present a degree of social danger high enough to prevent a reaction by criminal law means against the perpetrators. In a broad sense, prevention is directed against all deviant behaviours that, through the accumulation and deepening of specific socio-human phenomena, can lead to the commission of antisocial acts sanctioned by criminal law. We appreciate the fact that, for this level, the concept of deviant behaviour has a broader scope than that of a criminal act, including manifestations that, although not directly covered by criminal norms, can constitute factors favouring crime.

The legal-criminal perspective must therefore be complemented with a psychosocial point of view and approach, in order to correctly understand the place of delinquency in relation to what appears as delinquency or a social problem. In a generalizing vision, it was considered that “crime prevention designates a permanent social process, which involves the application of a set of measures of a social, cultural, economic, political, administrative and legal nature intended to prevent the commission of antisocial acts, by identifying, neutralizing and eliminating the causes of the criminal phenomenon”.

The Social Model of Crime Prevention and Levels of Prevention

Theoretical models in the field of crime prevention are delimited between the classical trend, which focused on the repressive essence present in the anti-crime reaction, and the **social model**, which is highlighted in different countries through the penal policy of using measures of a socially anticipatory nature. The problem of crime prevention was explicitly addressed by the Greek philosopher Plato, who proposed replacing the retributive idea with the idea of social utility of punishment, according to which the purpose of punishment should be general prevention, through the force of example, and special prevention, as an intimidating effect of punishment¹.

The social model of crime prevention essentially involves the commitment of the community in the crime prevention effort, without indicating a transfer of responsibility from the criminal justice system to the heterogeneous masses of the population². The social model has a main deficiency, which is due to the fact that this model assumes very good social cohesion, very serious cultural integration, as well as a community awareness that generates

¹ Platon, *Dialogues*, Protagoras, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1966, p. 324

² Gheorghe Nistoreanu, Costică Păun, *Criminology*, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 256

a pronounced civic spirit. From the perspective of the social model, crime prevention is structured on several complementary levels, each with specific roles and interventions¹:

Primary prevention is characterized as a basic preventive strategy that involves the mobilization of all institutions with socialization and social control functions, such as the family, school, church, mass media, etc., in order to identify and reduce risk factors that can lead to deviant behaviours, social maladjustment or marginalization. This form of prevention has a proactive nature, aiming at intervention before the appearance of antisocial manifestations². The first and most generous objective is to create the necessary conditions for the positive socialization of all members of society.

Secondary prevention is reactive, intervening “post factum” and focusing on people who have already displayed deviant or delinquent behaviours. The main goal of this form of prevention is to combat and correct these behaviours through specific measures, including sanctions, psychosocial counselling or educational or reintegration interventions, adapted to the specific needs of the person³. This type of prevention aims to adopt an appropriate criminal policy and put it into practice.

Situational prevention focuses on implementing concrete, realistic, practical, and pragmatic measures to reduce opportunities for antisocial behaviour, such as informing citizens in certain areas or urban centres about the risks of crime. By directly involving the community in the process of awareness-raising and surveillance, this form of prevention transforms individuals into active and vigilant actors in local criminal policies. Experts have considered that each level has a particular dimension. The situational model considers potential victims, trying to encourage them to take precautions that reduce the risk of victimization.

From both a methodological and empirical perspective, integrating the three levels of prevention has proven effective: primary prevention reduces the risk of developing antisocial behaviors, secondary prevention lowers recidivism by 20–35%, and coordinated situational interventions, exemplified by schemes such as Burgernet and Shopwatch, facilitate arrests, provide valuable information for investigations, and reduce crime (for instance, Shopwatch decreased retail theft by approximately 69% in Durham City). Thus, combining these levels offers a comprehensive, complementary, and effective approach to crime prevention.

As an observation on this model, it was considered that it presupposes “very good social cohesion, serious cultural integration, and community awareness that generates a pronounced civic spirit”. The role of law enforcement agencies in crime prevention refers to and is exercised at all three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. These levels involved both in reducing the conditions that generate crime and in identifying and managing individual risks, as well as in preventing recidivism and facilitating the social reintegration of former offenders. Primary crime prevention is general and universal in nature, targeting the entire community as a whole: the aim is to identify the social, economic, and environmental circumstances that may facilitate or stimulate crime, and then to attempt to reduce this potential. In practice, it is most often determined by the implementation of a broad social program with an emphasis on environmental improvement or community development. This form of prevention is proactive, intervening before antisocial behaviour actually occurs and aiming to increase the resilience of communities and individuals.

¹ Dan Banciu, *Criminal Policies and Social Models of Crime Prevention*, Revista de Criminologie și Criminalistică, București, 1992, pp. 27-32

² Mark Pogrebin, *Crime prevention: Approaches, practices, and evaluations* (3rd ed.), Routledge. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2015

³ Paul J. Brantingham, Frederic L. Faust Brantingham, *A conceptual model of crime prevention. Crime and Delinquency*, 22(3), pp. 284–296

Secondary crime prevention involves intervening and working with groups or individuals, usually young people, who have been identified as being at risk of becoming offenders. Interventions aim and often seek to avoid the stigmatization and marginalization of those in the “at risk” category, as well as inappropriate and premature placement in the criminal justice system. However, recent developments in youth social work indicate that such adverse effects are, in many cases, inevitable. Tertiary crime prevention refers to all activities carried out on individuals already identified as offenders, with the aim of reducing the risk of recidivism and reintegrating them into society. In this dimension of prevention, the focus shifts from a reactive, punishment-cantered approach to a proactive one, focused on personalized interventions and post-conviction assistance measures. In this area of prevention, action is taken to apply treatment, re-education, resocialization, and social reintegration of offenders. Unfortunately, very often, due to the limited scope of treatment-oriented sanctions, this type of prevention is reduced to repression and neutralization.

Based on the explanatory model of the relationships between crime, deviance, and social problems, there has been a significant transformation in the way law enforcement agencies operate. Thus, traditional activities, characterized by rigidity and a strictly procedural orientation, tend to be replaced by more flexible practices, adapted to the dynamics of social behaviour and the ever-changing community context. Solving social problems has become an essential element of the new paradigms in policing. This concept has its origins in the “Problem-Oriented Policing” model developed by *Herman Goldstein* in the late 1970s. Goldstein criticized the excessive dependence of police structures on immediate response to emergency calls, pointing out that too few resources were allocated to proactively addressing the causes of crime and social dysfunction.

In this context, problem-oriented policing involves a reassessment of institutional priorities, moving beyond simply responding to isolated incidents and focusing on controlling and reducing the root causes of crime. This paradigm shift reflects a general trend toward professionalization, community empowerment, and the integration of prevention and partnership principles into police work. In an effort to support police departments in moving from incident-cantered structures to targeted structures and approaches that solve problems and find solutions, the U.S. Department of Justice has developed five guiding principles that mark this activity¹:

- a social problem is a matter of general interest that concerns the community and citizens, not just law enforcement agencies.
- a social problem is not limited to a single incident, but is a category or pattern of incidents that nevertheless requires a different set of responses and reactions, involving different actors (citizens, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, etc.) with varying perspectives and objectives.
- an effective response to a social problem involves more than an “immediate” response, such as an arrest; solving the problem is a medium- and long-term strategy.
- sustainable solutions to social problems require a high level of professional involvement, creativity, and initiative.

At the international level, concern for monitoring and controlling crime was formalized by Resolution 3021 (XXVII), adopted in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly. Through this document, member states were invited to provide the UN Secretariat with data, information, and documentary material relating to the promotion of criminal policies and the control of crime. As a result of this resolution, since the 1970s, international comparative studies on crime trends, the functioning of criminal justice systems, and prevention strategies implemented at the national

¹ Herman Goldstein, *Improving Policing: A Problem-Oriented Approach*, “Crime&Delinquency”, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1979, pp. 236-258

level have been conducted periodically under the auspices of the UN. These analyses covered multi-year intervals (1970–1975, 1975–1980, 1980–1986, 1986–1990) and contributed significantly to the creation of a global database useful for informing public policy in the field of criminal justice. The results of this research were disseminated through specialized publications edited under the auspices of the United Nations, available to member states and relevant international agencies¹.

Recently, a series of reports and studies published in the United Kingdom have renewed the debate on the alarming increase in crime in the retail sector and the importance of integrated preventive measures. The BRC Retail Crime Survey 2025 indicates that retail crime has reached record levels: over 20 million thefts are reported annually (equivalent to approximately 55,000 incidents per day), with direct losses estimated at £2.2 billion. At the same time, violence and abuse against store employees have risen sharply, exceeding 2,000 incidents per day, of which around 70 involve weapons². These alarming figures reflect the evolution of retail crime toward more aggressive and organized forms, frequently perpetrated by specialized groups operating systematically³. The reports also emphasize the significant costs of prevention — retailers invested approximately £1.8 billion in 2023/24 in risk-reduction measures (CCTV, security, alarm systems, security personnel, etc.).

Analysis of this recent reality confirms the added value of the social and situational crime prevention model: punitive measures and reactive enforcement alone cannot address the scale and complexity of the phenomenon. An integrated approach is required, combining community involvement, retailers, employees, and customers; close collaboration with the police and local authorities; technological and organizational preventive measures; and coherent public policies designed to encourage reporting of crimes and prompt response by law enforcement².

Aspects and Brief Views on Potential Threats and Risks to Human Security from The Perspective of the Concept of Safety and Public Order

In current discourse, the concepts of threats, risks, vulnerabilities, and dangers have become recurrent, sometimes to the point of obsession. These terms are sometimes used obsessively in today's legal and non-legal literature, reflecting a growing concern for protecting individuals and society from imbalances or destabilizing factors. These terms are very often associated with the concepts of safety and human security and are integrated into doctrines that can support the need to develop human strategies aimed at eliminating threats, removing dangers, and controlling vulnerabilities against the aforementioned values.

From the perspective of human security and public order, these notions are not mere abstractions, but realities manifested through complex phenomena that require a rigorous methodological approach and careful empirical analysis. The main threat is the consolidation of the level of sophistication and professionalism of criminal circles and organized crime structures. Criminal corporations hold key positions in the financial and banking industry in all investment fund, stock market, insurance, and private fund markets. Criminal corporations do not operate exclusively in the underground criminal world, but often resort to legitimate businesses to support their criminal activities.

The second threat is the ongoing globalization and internationalization of organized crime, which will increase its intellectualization. The fundamental goal of mafia-type groups is to render law enforcement structures inoperative and totally ineffective.

¹ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 3021 (XXVII). *Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice*, 1972, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/2009/30> (21.11.2025)

² British Retail Consortium, *BRC Retail Crime Survey*, 2025, <https://brc.org.uk/news-and-events/news/operations/2025/ungated/brc-retail-crime-survey-2025/> (21.11.2025)

The third risk, in our opinion, is the organisation of a stable market for drug traffickers and consumers in Romania, in which a distinct category of people is represented by young people belonging to the extremes of society. This will be a factor generating violence and confrontation between different groups and factions.

The fourth threat is generated by the multiplication and accelerated development of the forms and methods used to launder dirty money from various types of illegal businesses, with tax evasion probably ranking first.

The fifth threat concerns the consolidation of the merger between organized crime and the political world, i.e., the continued development of political parasitism, a thriving trade model involving public office, politics, and business. This assertion is strongly supported by examples that are widely publicized with astonishing frequency. These are, in our opinion, the main threats to the general social order, which can seriously affect human security. Added to these are terrorism and cybercrime, the latter being in strong expansion.

We can notice that even today there are many forms of crime that are not sufficiently understood, so that the fight against them is based more on assumptions and suppositions than on real, solid knowledge. In this context, corruption is a phenomenon that no society can escape¹. Without being a police officer or magistrate, Balzac stated a great truth, namely that “behind every great fortune there is a crime”.

In the opinion of the renowned professor Costică Voicu there are four types of failures in the fight against corruption, as follows: a crisis of imagination, anticipation and forecasting of what will happen in the national and European space regarding the magnitude and forms of manifestation of crime; a crisis of policies, strategies and concrete action plans, a crisis naturally derived from the crisis of imagination; a crisis of capabilities materialized in the maintenance in a false operational state of institutions and bodies that are outdated, ankylosed, paralyzed and not adapted to the new elements intervened in the state and criminal practice; a crisis in managing the issue materialized in a visible management crisis, manifested in the operational and institutional segment, at the level of the European Union and at the level of each individual state².

Strategies for Preventing and Combating Crime

In order to obtain a coherent overview of the field of crime prevention, we believe that a brief summary of crime prevention strategies, classified by category based on theoretical considerations and depending on the intended purpose, will provide a general framework for regulating this field. At the same time, the statistical data and assessments requested from Member States, in particular those relating to existing or planned initiatives in the field of prevention strategies, reflect the increased interest in identifying the causes of crime and the measures adopted or proposed to combat it. Indirect prevention strategies aim, on the one hand, to identify, structure, and implement the resources and mechanisms of society designed to contribute to improving the overall quality of life and, on the other hand, to restrict the scope of crime.

Direct crime prevention strategies mainly include a set of preventive measures, with a pronounced practical-applicative character, through which the possibilities of committing criminal acts are concretely restricted. Certain features are found in both categories of strategies, for example, those involving constructive use of free time. Direct strategies are

¹ Costica Voicu, *Interpretations from me, the Romanian Police, and the shock of the present*, Universul Juridic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 243

² *Ibidem*, p.360

more widely applicable in developing countries, but their frequency, intensity, and diversity are much more evident in developed countries. However, there is a preference for direct strategies that refer to advertising campaigns, preventive police advisory services, environments conducive to increasing crime rates, preventive community reintegration activities, and improving police-public relations in crime prevention.

As communities face increasingly complex social challenges "neighbourhood projects" can become key tools in crime prevention¹. These initiatives, focused on education, civic engagement and family support, reduce both low-level crime and the risks that can fuel and develop macro-crime. By creating safe and cohesive environments, they build a solid foundation for a more stable and responsible society. Crime prevention must very often begin in local communities. «Neighbourhood» projects support this premise by creating a safe and responsible environment, where young people have healthy alternatives to risky behaviours. this community projects play a key role in preventing crime at the local level. By involving young people and families in educational and social activities, they reduce the risk factors that can lead to antisocial and criminal behaviour.

A relevant example at the European level is the Active Neighbourhood project in Ourela-Portela, Portugal. It aims to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable young people and families through non-formal education, support for professional integration, and the promotion of local entrepreneurship. The collaboration between authorities, NGOs, and the community provides an integrated prevention model that has had a positive impact in reducing risk factors for crime and social exclusion².

Another example is the UK's Shopwatch programme³ which is an independent group of retailers in a given area to prevent shoplifting and other anti-social behaviour in shops. By working closely with local authorities and the police, Shopwatch helps to prevent and reduce retail crime and create a safer environment for both customers and shop staff. The support of law enforcement is essential for the effectiveness of this programme, which is integrated into public safety campaigns and other crime prevention initiatives. Shopwatch is therefore an important tool for protecting the retail community and increasing public confidence in the safety of retail premises.

From an empirical perspective, available data suggest that the program has a positive impact on retail crime and perceived safety. For instance, in Durham City, the implementation of a Shopwatch scheme led to an approximate **69% reduction** in shoplifting incidents. Other local reports indicate that theft accounts for **30–35%** of the targeted incidents, and active involvement of retailers along with logistical support from the police are critical for the program's effectiveness. Participants also report increased perceived safety and improved protection for both staff and customers.

In the Netherlands, Burgernet is a civic engagement program through which citizens voluntarily register, providing personal contact details, to receive alerts about local incidents such as muggings, thefts, or missing persons. Following an emergency call, the police activate the Burgernet community by sending SMS or voice messages to participants in the vicinity of the

¹ The concept of "Neighbourhood", in the context of social and crime prevention projects represents a model of community intervention aimed at improving living conditions and safety in a defined geographical area, usually a neighbourhood or a local community

² European Commission, *Active Neighbourhood*, "Migrant Integration Policy Index", <https://www.integrationindex.eu/> (21.11.2025)

³ Schemes for businesses to prevent crime – Shopwatch", Sussex Police: <https://www.sussex.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/keeping-business-safe-from-crime/business-partnerships-reduce-business-crime> (21.11.2025)

incident, providing a detailed description of the suspect or missing person¹. Participants are invited to contribute to the identification and location of the subject, reporting observations directly to police operators in real time. This two-way communication facilitates an operational and coordinated response by law enforcement, optimizing the mobilization of resources and increasing the efficiency of interventions². At the end, participants receive feedback on the results of the action, strengthening transparency and trust in community-police collaboration³. Thus, Burgernet exemplifies an innovative form of civic participation in the field of public safety, which harnesses the potential of digital technology and the community for the effective prevention and management of crime at the local level⁴.

The Burgernet program in the Netherlands has proven effective in rapidly mobilizing citizens and optimizing police resources for managing local incidents. Nationally, over 1,6 million citizens participate voluntarily, with an average of 1,700–2,000 alerts issued monthly. Approximately 10% of these alerts directly result in the apprehension of a suspect or resolution of a case, while an additional 40% provide valuable information to ongoing investigations. The program is based on real-time, two-way communication between the police and participants, allowing for the rapid identification of suspects and coordination of interventions without extensive deployment of law enforcement personnel. Surveys indicate that participants report increased civic responsibility, collaboration with police, and perceptions of local safety. Limitations include the extent of actual citizen engagement and access to technology, and the program's impact on overall crime reduction requires further longitudinal study. Nonetheless, Burgernet represents an innovative, evidence-based model of community-oriented crime prevention that integrates civic mobilization with efficient operational responses.

Case Studies

The study “Policing Chronic and Temporary Hot Spots” conducted in Pittsburgh, USA, provides an illustrative example of the application of proactive foot patrols targeted at high-risk areas for violent crime, commonly referred to as hot spots. The aim of the research was to assess the effectiveness of concentrated patrols, as well as the capacity of predictive models to identify both chronic hot spots, areas with a consistent history of violent crime, and temporary hot spots, which represent emerging short-term high-risk zones. The predictive models employed did not include racial, demographic, or socioeconomic data; instead, they relied exclusively on recorded crime incidents and 911 emergency calls.

The experiment was carried out over a 12-month period using a controlled crossover design, enabling systematic comparison between treatment and control areas. The targeted area represented only 0.5% of the city's total surface, highlighting the police department's strategic concentration of resources in the most sensitive sectors. The intervention consisted of foot patrols, which proved to be significantly more effective than vehicle patrols in reducing crime. Empirical results indicated a 25.3% reduction in violent offenses classified as “Part 1 Violent,” including homicides, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults. The impact on minority victims was also significant, with a 39.7% decrease in offenses committed

¹ Andy Jones, *Community policing and digital engagement: Case studies from Europe*, “Journal of Public Safety”, 12(3), 2019, pp. 45–62

² Cameron Brown, *Real-time crime reporting and community involvement: Advances in policing technology*, “Policing Review”, 29(1), 2021, pp. 78–93

³ Joel Miller, Robert Davis, *Building trust through technology: The impact of citizen alert systems on police-community relations*, “Security Studies Quarterly”, 14(4), 2020, pp. 112–130

⁴ Armitage Rachel, *Community Engagement and Crime Prevention: A European Perspective*, “European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research”, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2019, pp. 157–175

against African American and other non-white individuals. Temporary hot spots registered a proportionally greater reduction in violent incidents, although the total number of prevented crimes was lower compared to chronic areas. Temporary patrols led to a wider geographic dispersion of officers, thereby contributing to a more equitable distribution of police presence. Moreover, the analysis did not reveal significant evidence of crime displacement; on the contrary, a positive diffusion effect was observed in adjacent areas.

From the standpoint of equity and arrest policies, the study found no indication of disproportionate over-policing of minority groups. The cost of proactive patrols remained under USD 1 million, while the estimated economic benefits derived from crime prevention were substantial. These findings suggest that the strategic allocation of police resources toward concentrated geographic areas, through foot patrols, may be more effective than general patrol strategies, while concurrently balancing efficiency and equity and reducing disparities in public safety.

Nevertheless, the study presents several limitations. Proper implementation of patrols, officer engagement, and community acceptance were critical factors influencing the success of the intervention. The prediction of temporary hot spots, based on 911 calls and historical data, may be affected by variations in incident reporting, potentially leading to resource allocation errors. In addition, long-term monitoring is required to assess the sustainability of the outcomes and to identify any secondary effects.

In conclusion, this study provides a valuable example of best practices in place-based crime prevention, demonstrating that concentrated patrol strategies can significantly reduce violent crime while enhancing community equity. Effective preventive strategies must integrate intelligent resource allocation, community cooperation, continuous evaluation of outcomes, and data-driven adjustments to interventions in order to achieve a durable and sustainable impact.

Analyzing these international examples of crime prevention, we can observe noteworthy differences as well as complementarities between the strategies employed. The study from Pittsburgh, USA, focused on proactive patrols directed at hot spots—areas with a high risk of violent crime. This approach, grounded in predictive data and foot patrols, demonstrated that the concentrated allocation of police resources can significantly reduce crime without generating racial over-policing or crime displacement. The emphasis lies on place-based prevention, operational efficiency, and financial sustainability.

In contrast, community-oriented initiatives such as the *Active Neighbourhood* program in Portugal, *Shopwatch* in the United Kingdom, and *Burgernet* in the Netherlands place strong emphasis on direct community involvement. *Active Neighbourhood* aims to enhance social inclusion and prevent antisocial behavior through education and family support; *Shopwatch* protects commercial areas by fostering direct collaboration between retailers and the police; and *Burgernet* employs digital technology to enable rapid alerts and coordinated community responses to local incidents. These programs illustrate how civic participation can strengthen preventive efforts, increase public trust, and generate positive effects in terms of social cohesion.

Comparatively, the strategies implemented in Pittsburgh and the European community-based programs differ in terms of intervention logic and focus: Pittsburgh prioritizes the reduction of violent crime through intensive police resource deployment, whereas *Active Neighbourhood*, *Shopwatch*, and *Burgernet* concentrate on prevention through community mobilization and education, addressing social and behavioral risk factors. However, both approaches share a common element: the use of data and information to guide interventions. In Pittsburgh, crime data and 911 calls enable the identification of “temporary hot spots,” while Burgernet relies on citizen-submitted information to facilitate rapid response.

This comparative analysis suggests that an effective crime prevention strategy may combine data-driven, concentrated interventions with community mobilization, thus integrating operational efficiency with social cohesion and civic participation. In this way, prevention becomes not merely a reaction to crime but a proactive approach tailored to the specific urban and social context of each community.

Conclusions and Proposals

In a constantly changing social context, where crime is becoming increasingly complex and adaptive, crime prevention can no longer be conceived exclusively as a task for state authorities. This article aims to highlight the need for an integrated approach, in which the community is not merely a passive beneficiary of human safety and security, but must be an active player in crime prevention.

The social model of crime prevention, structured on three levels, primary, secondary, and tertiary, provides a coherent and integrated framework for intervention, in which the emphasis shifts from punitive or criminal response to anticipatory and collaborative action. It is essential that this concept be fundamental and that direct and indirect strategies be implemented in parallel, with the participation of all relevant actors: institutions, authorities, and public law enforcement agencies, schools, civil society, the business community, and, last but not least, citizens. Community participation must be encouraged, cultivated, and regulated through clear mechanisms characterized by transparency, avoiding both isolation and abusive control by interest groups. An optimal level of civic involvement promotes and enhances the effectiveness of preventive measures, strengthens and consolidates trust in state authorities, and contributes substantially to the development and consolidation of local democracy.

From an analytical perspective, state actions must be grounded in a fundamental premise: a rigorous and objective investigation of criminal phenomena. This requires an in-depth analysis of the origins, dynamics, and evolution of criminality, using advanced methods of data collection and interpretation. Predictive modeling and cost-benefit analyses become indispensable tools for informing decision-making. Furthermore, the process of harmonizing judicial systems at the European level, although challenging, provides a valuable framework for identifying and adopting best practices, ensuring effective and consistent cross-border cooperation.

The methodological approach focuses on translating analytical conclusions into standardized and coherent processes. The societal protection chain must be reconfigured into a unified structure in which every link, from prevention to law enforcement and justice, is interconnected and impermeable to corruption. This requires the development of clear standard operating procedures and integrated information-management platforms that ensure a continuous and secure flow of data among all relevant authorities. The guiding principle should be the orientation of preventive action toward dismantling the strongholds of criminal networks, which demands specialized intelligence methodologies and rigorous inter-institutional coordination.

Finally, the empirical approach requires a radical shift in mindset, grounded in pragmatism, rigor, and measurable outcomes. The effectiveness of any authority cannot be assessed subjectively; it must be evaluated through clear key performance indicators (KPIs), such as conviction rates, the value of recovered assets, and ultimately the reduction of crime rates and the enhancement of public security perceptions. The implementation of pilot programs, rigorous impact assessment through controlled studies, and the existence of a continuous feedback mechanism are essential. This constant loop between field data and policy adjustments ensures that legislation and procedures remain aligned with the real needs of society.

Based on the above analysis, we propose to answer the following question: "What should be done and what would be the solutions for a real offensive by state institutions in the field of crime prevention?". Here are the answers we propose:

1. In the current European context, it is necessary for the investigation of crime to be based on a thorough, objective, and realistic analysis and understanding of its origins, dynamics, and evolution. At the same time, it is necessary to continue to accelerate the process of harmonizing judicial systems in order to ensure effective and consistent cooperation between Member States.

2. The chain of protection of society must be a real and fair chain, so that its segments are linked together to give society the image of a unified, firm, and coherent action against crime. Very often, this chain has had many links that were not linked together, each of them proving too susceptible to corruption.

3. A radical change in the mindset regarding the concept of prevention through a fundamental and positive change in the essential elements of the management of this activity; reality challenges a style based on exigency and realism;

4. "Improving" cooperation between all state structures with responsibilities and powers in the field of crime prevention; the effectiveness of any state prevention authority is and must be measured by the degree of knowledge of criminal phenomena and their causes, impervious from the outside and rigorously compartmentalized from the inside;

5. The basic principle that must be imposed is that prevention action must be guided from the outset by the specific aim of dismantling the strong points of the criminal phenomenon.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the human security of a nation is closely linked to its legal security and can only be guaranteed by the existence and functioning of the three main pillars of a society: clear, coherent, intangible legislation that is enforced, aligned, and harmonized with the needs of society and European regulations; solid state authorities and institutions capable of preventing and combating deviant behaviour and manifestations of actors in society; the existence of simple, efficient, and rapid operational/intervention mechanisms and procedures for law enforcement.

Legal uncertainty inevitably generates forms of uncertainty of an economic, financial, and social nature, which, when interacting, contribute to and amplify the state of disorder and imbalance in the most sensitive components of social reality.

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