

## **INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES TO URBAN SECURITY: THE CITY OF ZAGREB'S STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2025-2030 AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION**

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**Abstract:** The paper provides an overview of the strategic approach to urban security using the example of the City of Zagreb and recent international research, to present methodological frameworks and the social and scientific contributions of the urban security concept. By outlining the development process of the Urban Security Strategy for the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030, this paper explores key security challenges in contemporary urban environments, including crime, cyber threats, climate risks, and citizens' perceptions of safety. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of an integrated approach, community participation, and the role of local prevention councils. Urban security is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of the sustainable and resilient development of European cities. This approach is encouraged by EU recommendations on strengthening local resilience and risk management. Each town should develop local policies that ensure safe living conditions and an improved quality of life for its citizens. In this context, particular importance is given to prevention councils within city districts as key actors in identifying community needs and implementing safety measures at the level of local self-government. The Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb defines local and regional self-government units as responsible for specific measures, with an obligation to integrate them into local regulations, annual plans, and budgets. The Strategy was adopted by the City Assembly of Zagreb and published in the Official Gazette of the City of Zagreb No. 40/24. The City of Zagreb implements its authority through local and district self-government bodies and municipal administrative services, enabling the implementation of comprehensive and integrated security policies. In this way, the alignment of security measures with local needs and development priorities is ensured. The Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb incorporates both horizontal and vertical coordination, connecting local stakeholders with national security frameworks.

**Keywords:** urban security, City of Zagreb, prevention, prevention councils, perception of safety, integrated governance, citizen participation

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Urban security is becoming an increasingly complex and multidimensional concept that goes beyond the traditional understanding of security defined exclusively by crime. Today's urban environments face a range of challenges, from the physical safety of citizens and social cohesion to dealing with cyber threats and climate risks. The City of Zagreb is among the few cities in Croatia that has developed a specific Urban Security Strategy as a planning document

for the period 2025–2030, in cooperation with multiple sectors and stakeholders. This document builds on earlier strategic frameworks including the Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2014–2017 (City of Zagreb, 2014) and the Development Strategy of the City of Zagreb until 2020 (City of Zagreb, 2017). It covers topics such as public transport safety, cyber security, disaster resilience, and social inclusion. This confirms the need for proactive and anticipatory approaches in urban planning (Edwards, Hughes, & Lord, 2013).

Urban security is no longer the sole responsibility of the security sector, but an integrated part of a city's overall development policy (Borovec, 2013). Strengthened cooperation between different city sectors enables better risk identification and timely action. This paper applies methods of content analysis and review of relevant strategic documents and professional literature, combined with a comparative approach to examining key elements of urban security in the City of Zagreb in relation to international practices. This methodological framework ensures a systematic understanding of existing strategic solutions and their applicability in building sustainable and inclusive urban safety policies.

## **2. URBAN SECURITY AS A PUBLIC GOVERNANCE POLICY**

Urban security should not be reduced to technical and operational measures alone, but should be understood as a public policy issue that requires strategic, inclusive, and visionary urban governance (Cozens & Love, 2015). It encompasses the proactive engagement of local authorities in areas such as violence prevention, management of natural and technological disasters, climate change, and migration (UN-Habitat, 2007).

Such an approach involves continuous monitoring of changes within urban space and the adaptation of security policies to local specificities (Edwards, Hughes & Lord, 2013). The authors argue that urban security is a complex phenomenon that demands an understanding of how it is defined by policymakers and social science experts, emphasizing the need to align diverse perspectives.

Research concludes that the implementation of urban security often encounters disagreements due to expectations of universal definitions, which may discourage cooperation and hinder policy adaptation to local contexts. The authors advocate the use of deliberative and comparable methodological tools to ensure the reliable and democratic formulation of security policies. It is therefore essential to establish communication and jointly define the meaning of urban security, particularly within Europe's diverse political and cultural contexts (Edwards, Hughes & Lord, 2013).

Urban security is increasingly becoming a social issue that requires the engagement of the local community and political will for long-term change (Borovec, 2013). The question of the subjective feeling of safety is particularly important in understanding overall security in urban environments, as it goes beyond statistical indicators. Ostojić (2014) warns that the perception of safety often diverges from the actual security situation. Citizens may feel unsafe even in

circumstances where official statistics do not report an increase in crime. Such a discrepancy may result from multiple factors, including insufficient communication between relevant institutions and the population, the lack of visible presence of security services, and inadequate communication of measures being implemented in the community.

Cozens, Saville, and Hillier (2005) emphasize that the subjective feeling of safety in urban environments depends not only on actual crime rates but also on spatial perception, the level of citizen participation in decision-making and in shaping security policy, as well as on public trust in institutions. According to the Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030, citizen participation represents a key element of sustainable urban security. The document highlights the importance of encouraging active citizenship through the work of crime prevention councils, public consultations, local initiatives, and educational activities.

When citizens have the opportunity to directly participate in identifying problems and proposing measures to address them, their trust in the system grows, along with their sense of control over their own safety. Empowering community participation can result in a dual effect: strengthening social cohesion and reducing perceived insecurity, even under conditions of objectively low risk.

As the capital city, Zagreb has the potential to reduce the gap between actual and perceived safety through participatory models and local initiatives. Managing the perception of safety must therefore include clear communication of security measures, the visible presence of security services in the community, and citizen education (Cozens et al., 2005). In this context, the development of the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) concept is essential. It includes principles such as surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement, and maintenance of public spaces. The integration of CPTED into urban planning, architecture, and security policy is emphasized, along with the need to critically assess practices that may disproportionately affect marginalized groups.

The adoption and implementation of the Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030 requires continuous, systematic, and cross-sectoral coordination among all stakeholders involved in the implementation of its measures. These include city administrative bodies, public institutions, civil society organizations, and the expert community. The key operational body responsible for monitoring and implementation is the Working Group, composed of experts from the fields of civil protection, public safety, transport, education, social welfare, health, environmental protection, and public space management. Each member is responsible for a specific thematic area, and the work is coordinated with the City Office for Local Government, Transport, Civil Protection and Security (Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030).

To ensure better coordination and continuous implementation of the *Urban Security Strategy*, the realization of its measures is monitored through annual implementation plans and reports. Based on the proposal of the City Office for Local Government, Transport, Civil Protection and Security, the Mayor adopts the annual implementation plans of the Strategy. The implementing bodies are required to submit an annual report on the realization of their activities.

As part of this process, data collection from the field, preparation of expert analyses, and cross-sectoral cooperation are ensured, contributing to more effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Strategy's measures.

The thematic areas covered by the *Strategy* point to the expansion of the security concept beyond a narrow scope of repressive measures and represent an attempt to incorporate social and environmental factors as integral components of security policy.

### **3. INTEGRATION OF SECURITY POLICIES**

According to Khaliji and Jafarpour Ghalehtemouri (2024), it is essential to integrate various levels of action—structural, substantive, legal, and managerial—in order to achieve effective urban security. Their 2024 study analyzed urban security challenges in large cities, with a particular focus on privacy management in metropolitan areas. The results indicated that factors such as a lack of collaboration among security professionals, the absence of political consensus, and legal and managerial inconsistencies increase the vulnerability of urban spaces.

Additionally, systemic problems were identified, including weak legal regulations, insufficient budgets, and a lack of security equipment. Their research emphasizes that governments are increasingly aware of the need for integration, yet there remains a lack of coordination between disciplines such as urban planning, security, and social policy.

The Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030 (City of Zagreb, 2024) represents a step toward a systemic approach to security, encompassing physical, social, digital, and environmental dimensions. The key to success lies in operational implementation, community involvement, and ongoing evaluation of outcomes.

This paper highlights the importance of linking scientific insights, international best practices, and the local context as a foundation for sustainable urban security.

#### **3.1. Prevention councils: Local instruments of urban security**

Compared to the repressive measures of a reactive model of urban security, prevention is more effective and cost-efficient in the long term. Investment in urban design, transport infrastructure, the safety of schools and playgrounds, and education of children and youth on safety-related topics contributes to community resilience and overall quality of life (Tonry & Farrington, 1995). Accordingly, contemporary approaches to urban security increasingly emphasize the importance of local structures that enable participatory management of security challenges. The focus is thus placed on preventive, comprehensive, and inclusive models of action. In this context, prevention councils represent one of the key instruments for strengthening community safety, connecting institutions with citizens, and developing

sustainable local security policies. At the same time, they serve as platforms for building public trust and encouraging citizen involvement in public policy (Novak, Mihić and Bašić, 2013).

According to Novak, Mihić and Bašić (2013), prevention councils hold potential for strengthening cooperation between citizens, local government, and the police. However, their institutional positioning and operational effectiveness have yet to be systematically strengthened, leaving room for further development. The Urban Security Strategy of the City of Zagreb for the period 2025–2030 (City of Zagreb, 2024) explicitly highlights the role of local committees and city districts in identifying security priorities and implementing local measures, while also acknowledging the need to enhance the institutional support and capacity of prevention councils.

To improve safety, protect people and property, and enhance quality of life, the City of Zagreb established the City Prevention Council, chaired by the Mayor, with the Deputy Head of the Zagreb Police Department serving as Vice-Chair. The Council includes representatives from city offices and institutions, the police, civil society, and the academic community (UNDP & Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, 2011). This multi-sectoral structure enables a comprehensive approach to security and promotes a model of shared responsibility.

Based on national guidelines, a universal model for the operation of local crime prevention councils has been developed, which includes:

- clearly defined procedures for establishing councils,
- inclusion of relevant stakeholders,
- definition of concrete activities and priorities,
- financial sustainability,
- visibility and recognition within the community (UNDP & Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, 2011).

Crime and its broader consequences, particularly the fear of crime, significantly impact the quality of life in urban communities. It requires the involvement of all other components of community life. Community-based prevention demands the cooperation of numerous stakeholders, and prevention councils serve as a platform for coordinating different resources, approaches, and areas of expertise. This collaborative model reflects the direction in which crime prevention councils in Croatia are evolving (Borovec, 2013).

### **3.2. Evaluation and sustainability of the prevention system**

Experience shows that one-off activities such as non-interactive lectures, performances, and campaigns without evaluation have no long-term effect (World Health Organization, 2010). It is necessary to invest in practitioner training, cross-sectoral networking, and the application of national prevention standards.



One of the most systematic examples of evidence-based community prevention program evaluation is the *Communities That Care (CTC)* model. The first broad quasi-experimental evaluation of youth outcomes in communities implementing the CTC program focused on reducing adolescent problem behaviors (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). The evaluation analyzed 15 risk factors and six negative outcomes (substance use and delinquent behavior) among 38,107 youths in 2001 and 98,436 youths in 2003 in Pennsylvania schools.

Multilevel analyses compared student self-reports from communities implementing the CTC program with those from non-CTC communities, controlling for community-level poverty. The results showed significantly lower rates of certain risk factors and problem behaviors in the CTC communities compared to control groups. In a follow-up analysis, only student cohorts that were expected to have been exposed to evidence-based CTC programs were included, and the effects were even more pronounced.

These findings strongly support the argument that community coalitions can have a measurable impact on adolescent public health issues at the population level, particularly when expert-validated approaches and programs are used (Feinberg et al., 2007).

#### **4. TOWARDS A STRATEGIC VISION OF URBAN SECURITY**

Urban security today is based on three complementary approaches: legal, social-preventive and environmental. In the case of the City of Zagreb, all three approaches have been integrated within the framework of the local urban security strategy.

Through the development and adoption of the Urban Security Strategy for the period 2025–2030 (City of Zagreb, 2024) the City of Zagreb has positioned itself as an example of good practice in applying a systematic and participatory approach to urban safety. This document, which integrates sectoral policies, local needs, and international guidelines, affirms that urban security cannot be achieved solely through repressive measures, but through a holistic vision and multisectoral cooperation. In doing so, Zagreb ranks among the few European cities that simultaneously develop operational tools and strategic frameworks to enhance community resilience.

Urban security requires a strategic framework grounded in evidence-based data, institutional support, and citizen participation. In the case of Zagreb, urban security must remain a permanent concern of public policy.

The City of Zagreb has demonstrated that managing security in the modern urban environment is not a matter of temporary solutions, but a long-term vision, political responsibility, and professional coordination.

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