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Safety of Poznań residents after 1989 (selected aspects)

Abstract: Safety is one of the fundamental human needs which greatly affects the quality of people's lives. It is also a collective need the satisfaction of which is a task of public authority. That is why this authority takes many measures intended to protect society and individuals as well as their property against threats posed by violent acts of people and violent natural forces. According to the Polish legal regulations, ensuring safety and public order is a task of a commune, also an urban one. To this end towns set up such services as the police, the fire brigade, emergency medical teams, city guards, etc., intended to serve their inhabitants. Their feeling of safety and a low crime rate are indicative of a town's high level of civilisational and cultural development, but also make the town attractive as a place of residence for both, current and future inhabitants as well as to potential investors. The aim of this paper is to examine selected aspects of the safety of Poznań residents and changes that have taken place in this respect since 1989, the year when the systemic transformation started in Poland. A detailed analysis will be made of interventions by the Poznań police, fire service and ambulance service as factors that contribute the most to the safety of the city residents and their property.

Key words: public safety, safety in Poznań, operation of police, operation of fire service, Emergency Medical System

Introduction

The need of safety, both individual and social, is one of the fundamental needs of human life. From time immemorial, people sought to avoid threats and lead a safe life. Not only real, but also imagined threats to one's own being or the being of one's immediate family are felt very keenly. In order to eliminate or at least minimise those threats, the law is established and an army, the police and other institutions of this type are set up. Well-to-do people hire security firms, while those that cannot afford it at least secure their flats and houses with double entrance doors, buy insurance policies, or simply trust to providence.

The specific need of safety is a basis of organisation and operation not only in everyday life, but also in social and state life. In general social terms, it means assuring the needs of existence, survival, security, stability, identity, independence, and protection of the level and quality of life, which makes it not only the chief need of humans and social groups, but also the foundation on which states and international systems operate (cf. Rotfeld 1984). Thus, it is not a fact or state of affairs of one kind in an individual and a collective life. There is no doubt that it is simultaneously a social, political, economic, cultural, legal, ecological, and military phenomenon (Korzeniowski 2007).

Safety, however, is not only a need, but also a right of every human being. In accordance with the Polish legal regulations, ensuring safety and public order is one of the tasks of a commune, also an urban one. To this end towns set up such services as the police, the fire brigade, emergency medical teams, city guards, etc. Those measures are intended not only to ensure safety to inhabitants and their property, but also to improve the quality of life and make the city attractive as a place of residence for both, current and future inhabitants as well as to potential investors. They also seek to boost its competitiveness in a wider arena.

The aim of this paper is to examine selected aspects of the safety of Poznań residents and changes that have taken place in this respect since 1989, the year when the systemic transformation started in Poland. A detailed analysis will be made of interventions by the Poznań police, fire brigade and Emergency Medical System as services that contribute the most to the safety of residents and their property. However, the research will not focus on people's subjective feeling of safety, but on objective safety-related parameters, such as the number of crimes committed as well as the number and structure of interventions by selected services set up to ensure it. An analysis will also be made of changes taking place over time, leaving aside spatial aspects of safety, or how its level differs in the Poznań space. In the research use was made of unpublished data from units of the individual services; it was only in the case of the number of offences committed in Poznań and their detection rate that published data were drawn upon.

The research is currently conducted as part of the project run by the National Science Centre entitled "Life of a city. The case of Poznań".

Safety as a need

Safety is a state of certainty and of a guarantee of its continuance, which produces a feeling of stabilisation and allows an individual to develop. For those reasons it is considered one of the basic existential needs of the human being. Its characteristic is the absence of the fear of losing such values as life, health, feelings, respect, work, or goods, both material and non-material (Filipczuk 1998). Abraham Harold Maslow, one of the leading representatives of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, made the need of safety a foundation of his psyche model. According to him, only after it has been satisfied can there develop the need for love and belonging, and from this, the need for self-esteem, and finally,

the existential need for self-actualisation (Obuchowski 1995). Hence it is of fundamental significance for the existence of both, an individual human being and any community (Senchagov 2005).

Safety, understood as a state of no threats, is a subject of interest to many disciplines of natural, technical, medical, agricultural and social sciences, as well as to detailed disciplines deriving from the very beginnings of a scientific understanding of reality (Korzeniowski 2007). Threats, in turn, are variously understood and classified, depending on the situation described and the source of destruction. Generally, the following threats can be distinguished: (1) objective and subjective, (2) internal and external, (3) individual and group, (4) abstract and concrete, and (5) potential and actual (Korzeniowski 2007).

Potential causes of threats to human existence can come from one of the four sources (Korzeniowski 2007):

1. Inanimate nature: movement of the Earth's tectonic plates, volcanoes, typhoons, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other forces that have always threatened man's existence. In the recent years science has found an explanation to many of those phenomena and made it possible to anticipate their occurrence, and thus to get prepared and avoid the effects of at least some of them;
2. Living organisms (microorganisms, plants and animals);
3. Artifacts (man-made objects, e.g. buildings, machines, equipment, chemical substances, explosives); and
4. Man and society (acting on purpose, for true or imaginary reasons). Those can be activities of other participants of social life, detrimental and dangerous to the vital interests and basic values of a given person, group, society, or the whole of mankind.

Like a threat, safety can have an objective and a subjective aspect. The subjective aspect of safety has long been noted, but treated in terms of the perception of objective threats and conceptions of their elimination (Korzeniowski 2007). However, there can also be a subjective feeling about an imaginary threat existing in a person's consciousness or social consciousness but nonexistent objectively, outside this consciousness. The subjective aspect of safety can refer to: (1) the awareness of there being a real threat, (2) no such awareness despite the existence of a threat, (3) no awareness of how to counteract a threat, and (4) a false awareness of a threat that does not exist in reality (Korzeniowski 2007).

The citizens' feeling of safety is determined by a variety of factors. It is influenced by both, objectively existing conditions as well as past experiences and the activity of mass media, which often report and dramatise extreme and untypical occurrences affecting social awareness (Moczuk 2003). Thus, the subjective feeling of safety can be influenced by the existence of objective threats, but not necessarily.

From the point of view of the present paper, what determines safety is the elimination of objective threats understood as situations dangerous to life or health, in contrast to subjective threats generated by a psychic or legal state in which a individual has no feeling of security or support in another person or in an efficient legal system (Dictionary of contemporary Polish 1996).

This is a convenient point to note that safety is one of the determinants directly affecting the quality of life, and thus indirectly deciding about the competitiveness of cities and regions (cf. Małkowski 2008, Gierczycka-Bednarek 2009, Czudec 2010). Eloquent proof of the significance of safety is the new criterion employed in assessing the competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and communes, called “flexicurity”, which is a combination of flexibility and safety (Otwarty świat... 2008).

Safety is not only a need, but also a basic right of each citizen, embracing life in good health in accordance with the currently available knowledge and technology (Mohan 2003). And it is a duty of the state to secure it.

Ensuring safety and public order as a task of public authority is also stipulated by the Polish law. At the commune level, this duty is regulated by the Commune Self-Government Act. It obliges a commune to satisfy the collective needs of its inhabitants, this task embracing in particular matters of order and citizens’ safety as well as fire protection and flood control. To fulfil this duty, communes set up a variety of institutions, like the police and fire brigades, organise emergency medicine teams, and establish municipal guards. This is also done in Poznań, the capital of the Wielkopolska region, one of the largest cities in Poland with its population of nearly 650 thousand.

Police: tasks and interventions

The police is the basic state organ qualified to ensure safety and public order. Under Article 1 of the Police Act of 6 April 1990, it is a uniformed, armed, and society-serving force set up to protect the safety of citizens and to keep public safety and order. This formulation emphasises the serving role of the police towards society and states the chief aim of its operation to be safety (Hanusek 1996, Filaber 2009).

The organisation of the Poznań police includes the Municipal Police Headquarters and seven stations located in individual municipal divisions, further subdivided into precincts. To ensure public safety and order and to maintain social coexistence rules, the police undertakes various kinds of intervention, understood as any activity or measure taken by a police officer to counteract occurrences that clash with the law (Bukowiecka, Bukowiecki 2009). In other words, it is the response of police officers to an infringement of a specified order, intended to restore a state conforming to the law, and also one of the basic forms of performing duties that each police officer is trained for. During interventions policemen perform various activities which depend primarily on the type of occurrence involved. Those are usually checking documents, overpowering and detaining people, searching persons, checking their baggage, making some tests (e.g. for alcohol content in the air exhaled), giving tickets for offences, etc. (Bukowiecka, Bukowiecki 2009). Policemen are also called to various traffic-related incidents.

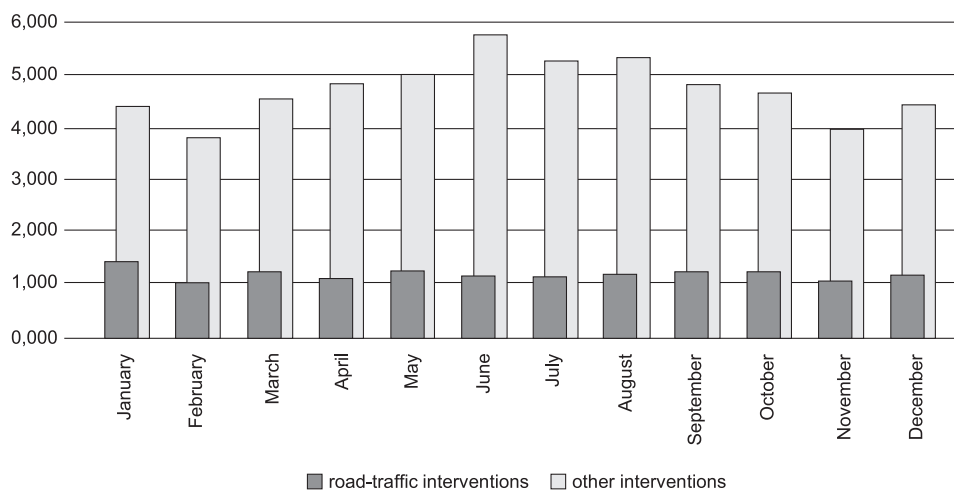


Fig. 1. Number of interventions of the Poznań police in the individual months of 2011
Source: own compilation on the basis of data of the Municipal Police Headquarters in Poznań.

The analysis of police interventions in Poznań was conducted on the basis of data obtained from the Municipal Police Headquarters for the years 2009–2011, divided into ‘road-traffic’ and ‘other’ kinds of intervention.

The data show that in those years the number of police interventions in Poznań grew from year to year. In 2009 there were a total of 65,973 interventions, of which fewer than 18% were road-traffic ones, while in 2011 there were 72,471 interventions, with traffic-related ones accounting for slightly more than 20%. Thus, in 2009 the police intervened nearly 5,500 times in a month, which gives an average of slightly more than 180 interventions per day, while in 2011 the respective figures were more than 6,000 per month and nearly 200 per day. There was also an increase in the number of police interventions per 1,000 residents: from 119 in 2009 to as many as 130 in 2011. This was also the tendency in road traffic, with 21 interventions per 1,000 residents in 2009 and 26 in 2011. To some extent this could be due to the city’s slowly declining population number.

However, the reality differs from the statistically calculated mean monthly figures. When analysing in detail the number and structure of interventions in the individual months of 2011, one can find that there were more police interventions in the summer months (June, July and August) than in winter (cf. Fig. 1). The incidence of traffic-related interventions, in turn, was similar in the individual months, which means that the season and its related differences in weather conditions as well as the state of roads have no significant effect on their number.

However, not every police intervention means that an offence has been committed. It was relatively rarely that the police turned to the public prosecutor’s office to start proceedings on suspicion of committing a crime (with crimes accounting for about 40–41% of interventions).

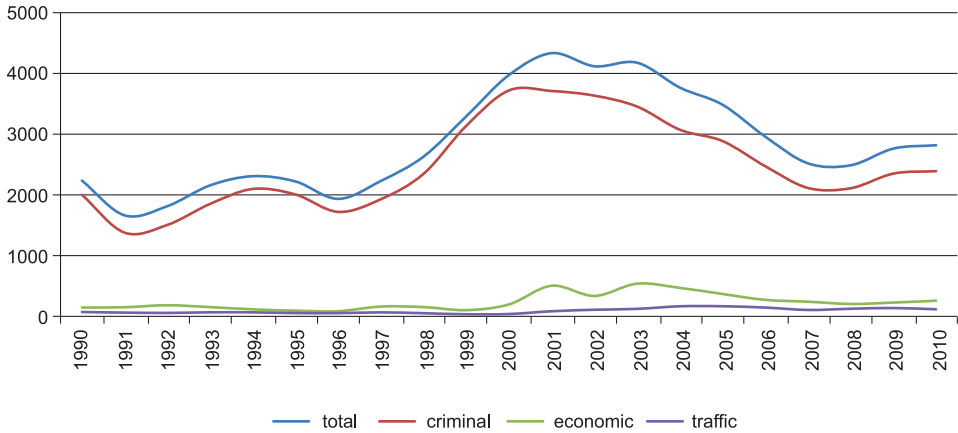


Fig. 2. Number of offences in Poznań over the years 1990–2010

Source: own compilation on the basis of the Poznań City Hall data.

The analysis of the number, structure (criminal, economic and road-traffic) and detection rate of offences committed in Poznań over the years 1990–2010 was conducted on the basis of statistics supplied by the City Hall.

The total number of offences committed in Poznań over the years 1990–2010 varied widely, the fewest (16,607) being recorded in 1991, and the most (43,323) ten years later, in 2001. Since that year the number of offences kept declining gradually until 2008 (with the exception of the year 2003), when it started growing slightly again to reach 28,156 in 2010. The most dynamic increase in the number of offences occurred between 1996 and 2001, and this involved both total offences as well as criminal and economic offences, although in this case a maximum was recorded in the years 2000–2005 (cf. Fig. 2). The greatest number of road offences, in turn, was noted in the period 2003–2006.

What also changed over the study period was the number of offences per 1,000 residents, from 38 in 1990 to 51 in 2010, with a maximum recorded in 2001, at 75. In the next years this figure kept going down, with a slight increase only in 2010. This was also the pattern of criminal offences, with 34 per 1,000 residents in 1990, 43 in 2010, and a maximum of 64 in 2001. An increase per 1,000 residents was also recorded in traffic offences, with 1.2 in 1990, 2.1 in 2010, and a maximum of 2.9 in 2005.

The structure of the offences committed in Poznań looks interesting. In all the years under analysis, a vast majority of them were criminal offences: they accounted for 81.58% of all offences in 2004 and as much as 95.24% in 1999 (cf. Figs 2 and 3). The share of economic offences also varied, ranging from 3.05% in 1999 to 12.86% in 2003. Road-traffic offences contributed the least to the total number. They accounted for an average of 2–4%, with the highest figure being recorded in 2005 (4.72%), and the lowest in 2000 (0.92%). This means a steady rise in both, the number and proportion of road-traffic offences in Poznań.

It is hard to establish unequivocally what caused the rapid growth in the number of both criminal and economic offences committed in the late 1990s and the

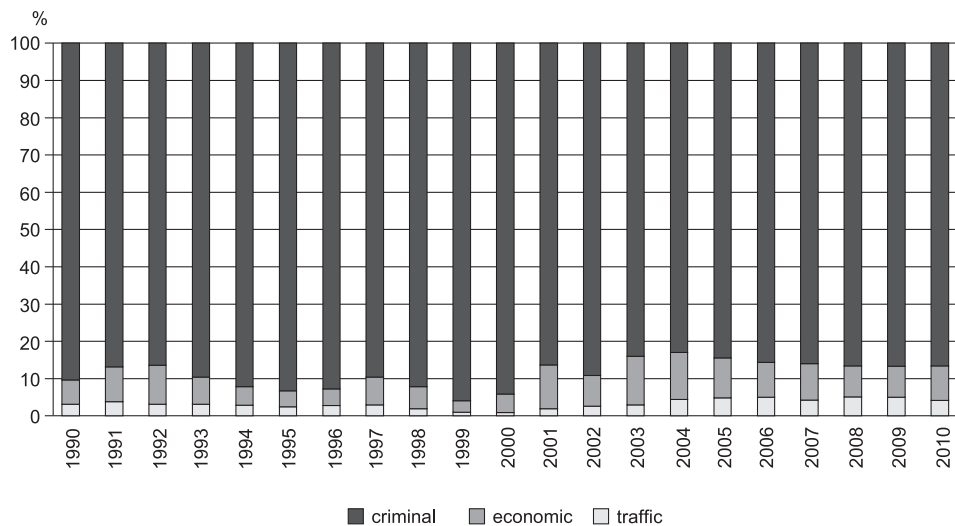


Fig. 3. Proportions of criminal, economic and traffic offences committed in Poznań over the years 1990–2010

Source: own compilation on the basis of the Poznań City Hall data.

early 2000s without knowing who exactly was the perpetrator of those offences and what motivated them. However, of no little influence could be the generally difficult economic situation of a country grappling with the processes of systemic transformation, liberalisation and inconsistencies of its law, and opening to the processes of internalisation and globalisation as well as seeking to be included in the European Union structures. In the case of Poznań, a big city for the Polish conditions, the rise in crime at the turn of the century could have been brought about by advancing processes of segregation (a departure from the rules of egalitarianism characteristic of the socialist period) and urbanisation (the start of suburbanisation processes accompanied by an ever growing phenomenon that has come to be known as residential mobility). In accordance with the theory of social disorganisation, when examining the variability of offences, the explanatory factor is primarily socio-economic differences among the various parts of a city (zones of wealth and poverty), as well as the urbanisation level. This follows from the fact that urban communities have a diminished possibility of social control (Shaw, McKay 1942, after Bogacka 2012).

However, what kept changing in the years under analysis was not only the number of offences committed in Poznań but also the detection rate of their perpetrators. Although data on this matter are incomplete (missing for the years 1996 and 1997), still one can observe a gradual and clear improvement in the rate, as illustrated by the trajectory plotted in Fig. 4. The detection rate was the lowest in the initial year of analysis (1990), 27.5% of the total offences committed, and the highest figure was recorded in the final year (2010), at 54.7% This can be considered an auspicious prognosis for the next years and perhaps a factor contributing to a higher level of safety in the city.

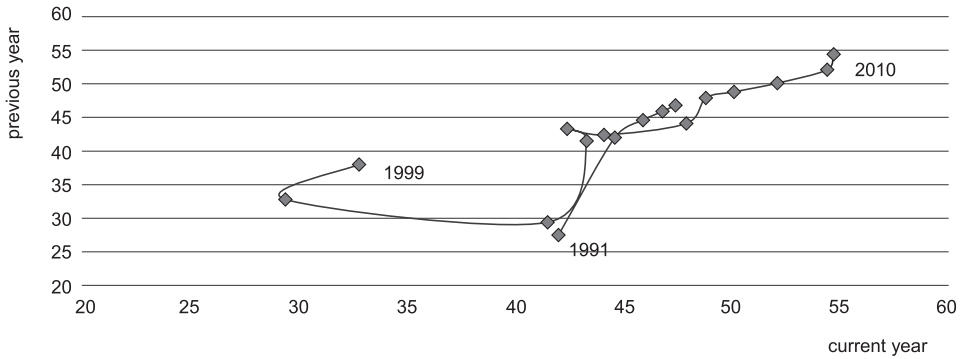


Fig. 4. Trajectory of the clear-up rate of crimes in Poznań over the years 1990–2010 (in %) Source: own compilation on the basis of the Poznań City Hall data.

Fire Service: tasks and interventions

The Municipal Headquarters of the State Fire Service (SFS) in Poznań is in charge of seven Firefighting and Rescue Units as well as the Crisis Management Centre. Among the activities performed by the units are biological, chemical and ecological, urban search, radiological, technical, water and diving, and rope rescue operations, as well as first medical aid.

Because of the wide range of their duties, SFS interventions can vary in nature. That is why they are divided into fires, other local threats, and false alarms. The term ‘other local threats’ is used to describe emergencies other than fires that require intervention of a rescue squad, like those caused by a defect or improper use of facilities and systems, a defect of a building, a defect or improper use of means of transport, improper storage of materials, improper performance of repair and construction work, irregular behaviour of animals, including insects, reptiles and birds, extreme atmospheric conditions, seismic shocks and coal mine bumps, premeditated human acts (terrorism), etc.

The data on interventions by the Poznań Fire Service were obtained in its Municipal Headquarters for the years 2003–2011. In that time interval the Service intervened a total of 76,685 times, which means an average of 4,036 interventions per year.

Worth emphasising is the fact that the number of SFS interventions increased substantially over the period studied. While in 1993 there were 2,569 of them (much below the calculated average), in 2011 this figure nearly doubled, to as many as 5,097 (Fig. 5).

As to the number of interventions in the individual years, there was an increase in all three kinds of them, but the highest growth dynamics was shown by false alarms (283%) and other local threats (271%), and the lowest, of fires (135%). A similar dynamics was obtained for interventions per 1,000 residents: 142% in the case of fires, 285% for other local threats, and as much as 298% for false alarms. The greatest number of fires per 1,000 residents were recorded in

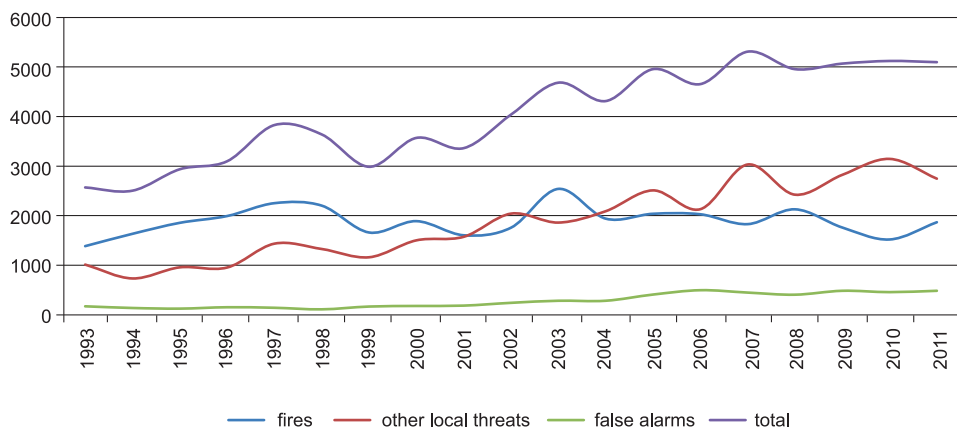


Fig. 5. Number of interventions of the State Fire Service in Poznań over the years 1993–2011

Source: data of the Municipal Headquarters of the State Fire Service in Poznań.

2003 (4.42), of other local threats, in 2010 (5.70), and of false alarms, in 2006 (0.88), with only a lightly smaller figure for the years 2009 and 2011 (0.87). In general, the greatest number of Fire Service interventions occurred in 2007 (9.5), then in 2010 (9.28) and 2011 (9.21), and the smallest number, in the initial years of analysis (4.30 in 1994 and 4.41 in 1993).

There was a significant change in the structure of SFS interventions in Poznań. Fires contributed the most to their total number in the years 1993–2000 and in 2003, with a maximum in 1994 (65.26% of the total number of interventions), and

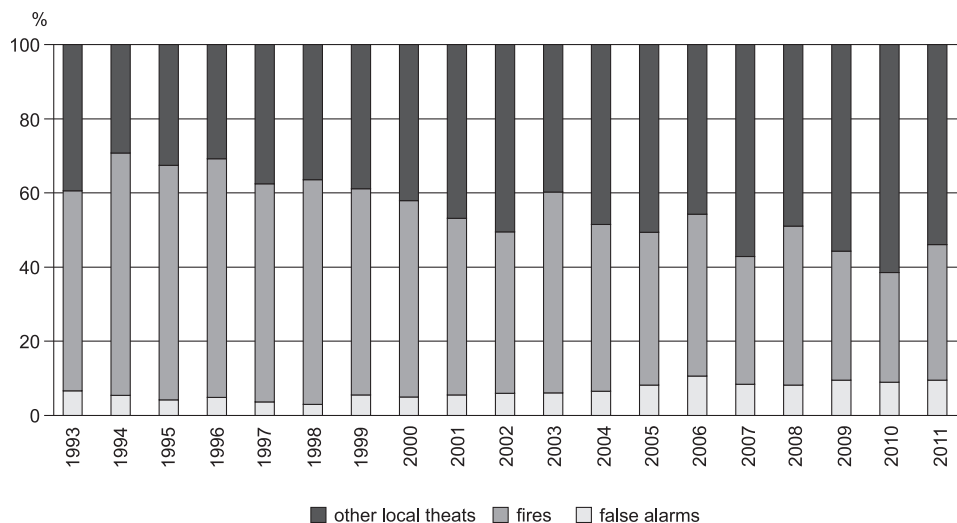


Fig. 6. Structure of interventions of the State Fire Service in Poznań over the years 1993–2011 (in %)

Source: data of the Municipal Headquarters of the State Fire Service in Poznań.

the least, in 2009 (a mere 29.66%) (Fig. 6). From 2004 other local threats started to dominate (with a maximum in 2009 – 61.41% of the total number of interventions, and a minimum in 1994 – 29.27%). The share of false alarms ranged from 3.02% in 1998 to 10.66% in 2006, which shows a slow increase in their contribution.

Generally, it can be observed that with the passage of years the total number of Fire Service interventions keeps growing. This can be put down to civilisational progress, but it also has to do with burdening the SFS with ever new duties (tasks in the fields of emergency medical services, emergency road services, securing mass events, etc.). Another thing worth noting is that the proportion of fires in the total number of interventions kept declining in favour of other local threats and false alarms. Especially upsetting is an increase in the proportion of the latter (false alarms), probably resulting from a low awareness of the consequences of this type of irresponsible actions and the fact that, employed in this way, firemen cannot assist in simultaneous events actually requiring their intervention. The increase in the number of false alarms is also worrying in terms of the growing terrorist threat and the necessity to evacuate places or facilities of key significance for the operation of the city that it often generates (schools, public utility buildings, airports, etc.).

Emergency Medical System: services and interventions

The task of the Emergency Medical System (EMS) units is to provide out-of-hospital acute medical care.

The Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań has 14 waiting places for its EMS squads. Their services are divided into four categories: accidents, illnesses, transport, and ambulatory care. The data used in the paper come from the Sta-

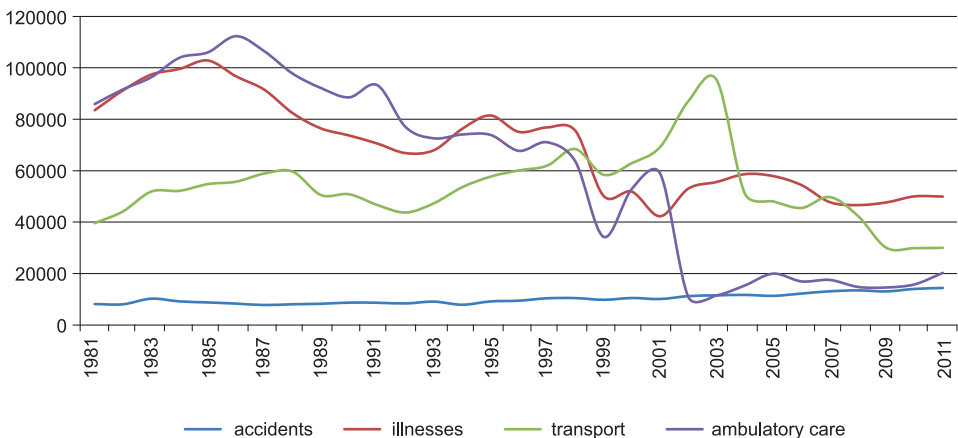


Fig. 7. Number of services provided by the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań over the years 1981–2011

Source: data of the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań.

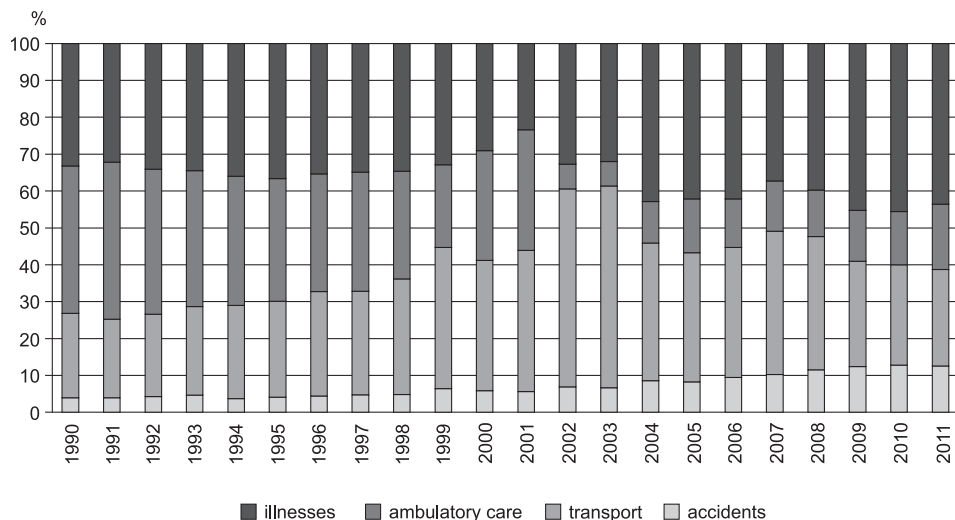


Fig. 8. Structure of services provided by the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań over the years 1990–2011 (in %)

Source: data of the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań.

tion. Since it performs supra-local functions, no analysis was made of the number of interventions calculated per 1,000 Poznań residents.

Between 1990 and 2011 the number of calls received in Poznań dropped significantly (Fig. 7), nearly by half (the change dynamics being equal to 51.70%). The steepest decline was noted in the number of ambulatory-care services (a change dynamics of 22.91%), transport services (a change dynamics of 59.01%) and illness-related services (a change dynamics of 67.77%), while the number of calls to various types of accidents grew significantly (a change dynamics of 165.53%).

What also changed was the structure of EMS services provided (Fig. 8). There was an increase in the proportion of accidents (from 3.93% in 1990 to 12.58 in 2011) and illnesses (from 33.23% to 43.56%), the share of transport did not change much (22.93% in 1990 and 26.17% in 2011, with an increase in the proportion of this type of services in 2002 and 2003), while the contribution of ambulatory care declined (from 39.91% in 1990 to 17.68% in 2011).

It is interesting to note the structure of EMS services in Poznań on individual days of a selected month. When analysing data for March 2011, one can observe a radical change in the structure of services provided at weekends (Saturday–Sunday): a significant jump in illnesses and ambulatory care against a decline in transport (cf. Fig. 9). As to the proportion of accidents, no regularity can be observed in connection with the particular days of the week.

It is rather hard to account for the decline in the number of EMS services over the years 1990–2011. While it can certainly be a welcome sign of a decline in the number of threats to the safety of Poznań residents, this decline seems to be primarily due to the legal regulations introduced which require the caller to

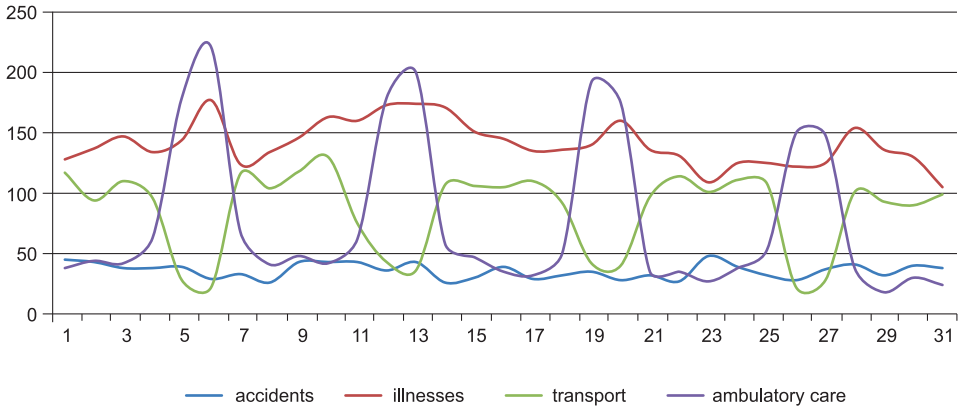


Fig. 9. Number of services provided by the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań on individual days of March 2011

Source: data of the Ambulance Service District Station in Poznań.

cover the cost of intervention by Emergency Medical System squads in cases of unjustified calls.

Summing up

There is no doubt that safety is an important need in the life of every human being. It largely decides about people's survival and development. Although it is a subjective category, i.e. connected with an individual's sense of threat or its absence, conclusions about the level of security can be drawn on the basis of actual events and threats that took place in the near and more distant past. This is the type of research undertaken in this article, with the reality assessed in terms of time rather than space.

On the basis of the research conducted, it is hard to make an unequivocal assessment of changes that took place in the safety of Poznań inhabitants over the study period. Basically, however, it seems that the declining number of offences committed since the early 2000s, improvement in their detection rate, and diminished need for emergency medicine can indicate an improvement in safety and be a good omen for the future. At the same time there was a rise in the number of police and fire service interventions, the most dynamic growth being recorded in the number of false alarms, and this should be assessed as an undesirable tendency.

With the study period being fairly long, the research results also allow tracing some socio-economic changes that have accompanied the systemic transformation as well as changes in legal regulations and the level of life of Poznań residents. Examples include an increase in the number of economic offences in the initial years of the transformation period or an increase in the number of interventions in traffic and accidents, largely an effect of the population getting richer and a higher number of cars on the roads. Counteracting this type of threats, as

well as raising the awareness of people, especially young, of the consequences of false alarms, should be an important component of a policy intended to make Poznań residents safe in the nearest years.

Translated by Maria Kawińska

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