

Sheet LII: Crime distribution in Łódź as in 2002

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Political and economic changes that have taken place in Poland since 1989, above all the increased democratic freedoms, weak governments, legal loopholes, social unrest in the transformation period – all contributed to increased crime (Holyst 1994). A particular worrying factor were the deepening pathologies in the structure of crime, as listed by Holyst: 1) growing risk of crimes against human life, health and property, combined with aggression, violence, and cruelty to victims; 2) use of fire arms by offenders against victims and intervening police officers; 3) growing number of retaliation crimes: homicides, assaults, batteries, and criminal terrorism; 4) increased number and professionalism of criminal gangs in Poland; 5) corruption in underage youths resulting in crime (ibid.).

Łódź is a relatively safe city. The overall number of recorded offences in the period 1988–2001 increased by 232% (tab. 1), i.e. below the national average (Marcińczak, Siejkowska 2004). Characteristic is the increased number of offences committed in the second half of the 1990s, up by approx. 20% on the first half of the decade. Particularly worrying is the change in the structure of crime. With the proportion of economic crime definitely going down since 1988, the percentage of criminal offences in the city has increased by as much as 490% and these prevail in the criminal statistics (93.6% of the overall number of crimes).

Table 1. Crime recorded in Łódź in 1988, 1995 and 2001

Recorded crimes	Year		
	1988	1995	2001
Total	15 348	22 107	35 559
Criminal offences	6 796	19 718	33 269

Source: Own compilation based on A. Wołaniuk (1997) and the data provided by the Regional Police Department in Łódź.

Similar to other large Polish cities, Łódź is undergoing a worrying process of deepening pathologies in the structure of crime, especially increased number of violent crimes (tab. 2). In the period under study, the number of recorded rapes grew by 40%, homicides by 57%, assaults and batteries by 392%, and robberies by as much as 1485%.

Table 2. Criminal offences committed in Łódź in 1988 and 2001

Type of crime	Year	
	1988	2001
Homicide	33	58
Bodily injuries	146	295
Assault or battery	55	271
Aggravated assault	137	2 171
Rape	30	42

Source: Own compilation based on A. Wołaniuk (1997) and the data provided by the Regional Police Department in Łódź.

The structure of criminal offences committed in the city is definitely dominated by offences against property. The structural changes of crime that took place in the period 1989–1994 and were oriented towards the offences of property appropriation, especially vehicle theft (Holyst 1994), continued into the period 1995–2001.

The studies carried out by researchers in Chicago in the early 20th century indicated that crime is not evenly distributed in the urban space. Some parts of the city, with a certain social composition and type of development, were characterised by a varied frequency of the various types offences. These observations were later confirmed in other cities in North America and Europe (Knox, Pynch 2000) and gave rise to a new discipline – environmental criminology (Herbert, Hyde 1985) – which brought to attention the role of certain socio-spatial variables in the development of crime in urban space. According to this concept, the key role in the distribution of crime is played by land use diversity which at the given time determines the population’s socioeconomic activities and composition. Moreover, it determines the number of interactions between the potential victims and perpetrators. Hence, the functional and spatial land use diversity affects the spatial structure and the number of interactions which may lead to criminal occurrences. In other words, crime occurs when an opportunity to commit it (e.g. steal a radio from a car) appears, in an area regarded by the criminal as suitable (e.g. a poorly lit, unguarded parking space).

In this kind of studies, due to the particularly spatial nature of the analytical methods, urban geographers, aside from criminologists, have played a major role. In the course of such spatial analyses, out of the different sorts of data provided by crime fighting institutions, utilised is the information aggregated for the given districts (Ceccato, Haining, Signoretta 2002).

In this study, for the purposes of spatial analysis of crime, i.e. an analysis of the crime scene location and place of abode of the perpetrators, applied was the city’s actual grid of 78 policing districts. In the authors’ opinion, this grid is fully suitable for conducting research into the spatial distribution of crime, because the districts so mapped are relatively homogeneous as regards the type of housing stock and can be allocated to one of the six basic types of community areas in Łódź (Cf. Marcińczak 2006). The key indicator used in the study of spatial distribution of crime is the number of offences per hectare or the number of offences per 1000 inhabitants. In this study, the latter indicator was used, as the analysis mainly concerned crimes against life, health, and property of Łódź citizens.

The general spatial distribution of crime, as reflected by the ration of the total number of offences per 1000 inhabitants (map 1), indicated similarities with other cities in Western Europe, North America, and Poland. The key characteristic of the spatial variability of crime was the radial decrease in the number of offences away from the city centre. In other words, the phenomenon was most intense in the inner city of Łódź (within the area encircled by the ring railway), i.e. in the area densely built-up with pre-war tenement houses and usually of low social status. Additionally, it is an area with the greatest functional diversity.

Apart from housing, industrial and service developments are located in the area. The inner city’s central zone contains the city centre with its most important administrative buildings, shops, and specialized services. And last, but not least, this area is the destination of

large numbers of people from other parts of the city day or night (work, entertainment). According to the authors, the high crime-rate in the city centre is caused by the presence of a large number of potential victims and the prevalent type of tenement housing development, which offers the potential offender with good knowledge of the area an opportunity to escape, while for outsiders it is a true maze.

Other areas with high crime rates included parts of industrial Teofilów and the southern part of the former suburban areas (Ustronna, Górki, Bronisin). For Teofilów, the most important problem is the correlation between crime and high values of other indicators of social decay: poverty, unemployment, and the percentage of offenders in the total number of inhabitants (Cf. Marcińczak 2006). On the other hand, the southern part of the suburban zone is characterised by new luxury housing developments, whose occupants represent a higher social status and are potential targets of criminal activity.

The spatial distribution of offences against property – burglaries (map 2) is a little different. The highest ratio was recorded at large private housing estates inhabited by the higher social strata (New Złotno, Huta Jagodnica, Julianów, Stoki, Ustronna). A deviation from this pattern is the large number of burglaries recorded in the very centre of Łódź, in the area of Central Residential District (Śródmiejska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa), with high-rise apartment buildings surrounded by tenement houses. In the authors’ opinion, the size of the high-rise buildings fosters anonymity and, consequently, the lack of ‘neighbour alertness’. Consequently, offenders can enter and leave the building unnoticed. The phenomenon can be explained in a similar way in the case of other Łódź microdistricts, where the number of such offences is higher than the city average..

Interferences with vehicle and vehicle taking represent another category of offences against property (map 3). The highest crime-rate in this category was recorded in the microdistricts already mentioned herein above: industrial Teofilów, the western part of Stoki, the city centre, and Ustronna. Moreover, an exceptional concentration of this type of crime is observed in the areas with small blocks of flats in Karolew, Retkinia, Teofilów, Widzew Wschód, Dąbrowa, and Doly. These areas lack parking spaces, especially attended car parks, and most cars are left without protection, mainly in the little streets between blocks and on pavements. This makes them easy prey for thieves.

Crimes against human health and life (map 4) occurred mainly in the very centre of Łódź, i.e. in the area with the largest number of service and entertainment outlets. Other areas exposed to this kind of crime are the areas in the neighbourhood of football stadiums (‘Łódzki Klub Sportowy’ and ‘Widzew’). In general, the further away from the city centre, the smaller the number of crimes against human health and life. The only exceptions are Łągowniki (the largest forest complex), Andrzejów (former exurban area), and industrial Teofilów.

The spatial distribution the proportion of perpetrators in the overall number of population, as reflected by the number of offenders per 1000 inhabitants (map 5), is a copycat of the pattern characteristic of the total number of offences. This means that in the areas with high crime rates the percentage of offenders is also above average, which may suggest a certain ‘localness’ of crime. In other words, the similarity of both maps implies that offenders usually act in close propinquity to the area where they live

In conclusion, the areas with a high percentage of offenders’ dwellings – the inner city and the industrial areas from the 1970s – also showed a high percentage of population in the lower social class (unemployed, social welfare beneficiaries), and living in poor housing conditions (mainly old buildings, insufficiently fitted with modern conveniences) (Cf. Marcińczak 2006).

Literature:

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