



INSTITUTE OF RETAIL ECONOMICS

PLACE-BASED COLLABORATION: A REVIEW

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Abstract: Place-based collaborations are widely used to improve safety and local economic conditions, but the evidence base regarding their effectiveness remains conceptually fragmented. We use an institutional framework based on three design dimensions – who controls resources, the degree of formalization, and the mode of coordination – to classify major place-based collaboration models into four categories: (1) integrated collaborations; (2) police-centered interventions; (3) school-based programs; and (4) community-based initiatives. Synthesizing international evidence on these categories, we find that more formalized and resource-coordinated models, particularly integrated and police-centered interventions, show more consistent crime-reducing effects. However, this pattern partly reflects evaluability differences, as less formal, community-based initiatives are harder to assess using standard causal methods. We argue that outcomes depend on both institutional design and the type of collective action problem addressed, and outline implications for future research emphasizing institutional analysis, a greater focus on economic outcome measures, and design-aware evaluation strategies. The review offers an organizing framework and consolidated evidence to guide researchers and practitioners on what works, under what conditions, and why.

Keywords: place-based collaboration; interventions; regulations; institutional design; crime

JEL codes: R58, K42, H41, R23.

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1. Introduction

Vulnerable neighborhoods perceived as being “left behind” have attracted renewed attention in both policy and research. Such areas are often characterized by concentrated poverty and crime, with consequences for individual life opportunities (Sen, 2001), perceived safety, and local economic development (Hipp et al., 2019). In response, place-based policies—defined by the OECD (2025) as intentionally spatially targeted policies intended to improve long-term economic development and well-being—have gained increasing prominence.

Although there is no universal solution to the problems facing vulnerable areas, collaboration among public, private, and civil-society actors is a recurring component of place-based policy. We use the term *place-based collaboration* to denote coordinated efforts by multiple actors to improve conditions within a defined area (cf. The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, 2021).¹ Examples include Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), focused deterrence programs, school-based interventions such as KiVa, and resident-led neighborhood watch initiatives.

From an institutional perspective, place-based collaboration can be understood as a configuration of rules, roles, and resource flows that structures how actors jointly produce safety and local development. Such collaborations constitute polycentric arrangements operating within existing legal, fiscal, and administrative frameworks (Aligica & Tarko, 2012; Ostrom, 2010). Recent contributions describe polycentricity as an adaptive framework in which diverse institutions can respond to changing conditions (Rayamajhee & Paniagua, 2021) and address collective action problems spanning multiple, overlapping scales through co-production among public, private, and civic actors (Paniagua & Rayamajhee, 2022). Research on local public administration also illustrates how internal coordination structures shape collective responses to cross-cutting policy problems (Roggero & Thiel, 2018). Place-based collaborations similarly pool resources and knowledge but lack clear efficiency signals such as prices, making goal alignment, responsibility, and accountability central challenges (Hayek, 1945). Broader participation may enhance legitimacy, local knowledge, and capacity while also complicating decision-making and weakening accountability.

The evidence on place-based collaborations is fragmented across economics, criminology, urban planning, and related fields. Studies are typically organized around particular sectors or program labels and range from qualitative case studies and process evaluations to experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations. This fragmentation makes it difficult to compare interventions or determine whether differences in their outcomes reflect program content, institutional design, implementation conditions, or evaluability. To our knowledge, previous research has not provided a systematic institutional framework for explaining why place-based

¹ In Sweden, the concept (*platsbaserad samverkan*) is already established. It has gained renewed attention following a recent government inquiry proposing legislation that would allow property owners to be required to pay a mandatory fee to support collaborative programs aimed at increasing local safety (SOU 2025:5). This legislation went into effect in August 2026.

collaborations emerge, which organizational forms they take, and how their institutional features relate to their effectiveness.

We start from the premise that place-based collaborations must address different collective action problems, including coordination failures, enforcement deficits, norm formation, and weak collective engagement. These problems create different organizational requirements. Building on institutional economics, we conceptualize collaborations along three dimensions: control over resources (Ostrom, 1990; Williamson, 1985), degree of formalization (Greif, 2006; North, 1990), and mode of coordination among actors (Ostrom, 1990). Together, these dimensions capture who has the capacity to act, how predictable and enforceable the rules are, and how participating actors interact.

Empirically, we identify ten established program models and classify them into four broad categories: integrated collaborations, police-centered interventions, school-based programs, and community-based initiatives. We then review evidence on their effects in three domains: crime and safety, local business activity, and place attractiveness. Extending the analysis beyond crime is important because safety, economic activity, and neighborhood development are interdependent. Crime imposes costs on firms and residents, discourages investment, and may reduce local demand (Rosenthal & Ross, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2018), while economic conditions shape both opportunities and incentives for offending (Becker, 1968; Cohen & Felson, 1979). Place-based interventions may therefore influence broader economic and spatial outcomes even when crime reduction is their primary objective.

The evidence indicates that institutional design shapes both program effects and the strength of the evidence through which those effects are observed. More formalized models with centralized or pooled resources generally produce clearer and more measurable crime-reduction effects. Programs operating through norm formation, voluntary participation, or informal social control generate more heterogeneous outcomes that may emerge gradually and prove harder to evaluate. Evidence concerning business activity and place attractiveness is limited across most program categories, with BIDs providing the principal exception.

The article contributes an organizing framework that connects localized collective action problems to institutional design, observed outcomes, and evaluability. By shifting attention from program labels to underlying governance structures, it integrates previously separate strands of research and provides a basis for comparing interventions across sectors and contexts. The framework helps explain not only whether place-based collaborations work, but why their effects and evidentiary foundations vary.

2. Place-Based Collaboration – an institutional framework

2.1. An integrated approach to crime and economic outcomes

Place-based collaborations are often evaluated primarily in terms of crime reduction and safety. From a local development perspective, however, crime, safety, and economic conditions are

interdependent. Crime affects business activity, consumer behavior, property values, and neighborhood trajectories (Cook & MacDonald, 2011; Fe & Sanfelice, 2022; Hipp et al., 2019), while local economic conditions shape opportunities for offending, informal guardianship, and institutional capacity (Branic & Hipp, 2018; Brinkman & Mok-Lamme, 2019; Khanna et al., 2021). Interventions targeting safety may therefore generate wider economic and spatial effects, while changes in local economic activity may influence crime.

Becker's (1968) economic model conceptualizes offending as shaped by expected benefits, risks, and opportunity costs. Employment opportunities, income, and future economic prospects may raise the opportunity cost of crime, whereas commercial activity and concentrations of potential targets can increase its expected benefits (Chalfin & McCrary, 2017; Edmark, 2005). Routine activity theory complements this perspective by emphasizing how pedestrian flows, land use, and commercial activity shape the convergence of offenders, targets, and guardians (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Commercial environments can simultaneously create crime opportunities and strengthen informal guardianship through increased visibility and more "eyes on the street" (Jacobs, 1961; Weisburd, 2015).

Social disorganization theory adds a longer-term institutional perspective by emphasizing neighborhood stability, social cohesion, and informal social control (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Research on collective efficacy and neighborhood change suggests that crime and economic conditions may evolve through reciprocal feedback processes (Boggess & Hipp, 2016; Hipp, 2010; Sampson, 2012). Institutional fragmentation and disinvestment may reinforce cycles of crime and decline, whereas coordinated local institutions may support safety, investment, and place attractiveness. Together, these perspectives indicate that place-based collaboration should be evaluated across interconnected social, economic, and spatial outcomes.

2.2. Institutional theory: Collective action problems in place-based collaboration

Place-based collaboration can be understood as a form of polycentric governance in which partly autonomous public, private, and civic actors operate within a shared institutional environment (Aligica & Tarko, 2012; Ostrom, 2010). Wagner (2016) describes such governance as "entangled": actors continuously shape one another's opportunities and constraints rather than operating through a single hierarchy. Place-based collaboration is therefore not a discrete intervention detached from its surroundings, but a governance arrangement embedded within wider legal, fiscal, and administrative systems. Recent work likewise highlights polycentricity as an adaptive framework in which diverse institutions can respond to changing conditions (Rayamajhee & Paniagua, 2021), including collective action problems operating across multiple and overlapping scales (Paniagua & Rayamajhee, 2022).

Institutional rules determine who participates, how decisions are made, and how costs, authority, and responsibilities are allocated. Differences in these rules-in-use can affect both outcomes and legitimacy (Ostrom, 2010; Ostrom et al., 1994). They are particularly important because place-based collaborations address collective action problems. Multiple actors may

share an interest in reducing crime or improving local attractiveness but remain unable to coordinate because resources are dispersed, incentives diverge, and responsibility is unclear (Hayek, 1945; Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1990).

The nature of the collective action problem varies. Some collaborations address enforcement deficits requiring rapid and credible action. Others coordinate interdependent investments, services, and planning decisions, while still others seek to change social norms or strengthen informal social control over time. These problems create different institutional requirements: hierarchy may facilitate enforcement, networks may coordinate interdependent actors, and norm-based arrangements may support behavioral change and collective engagement.

We therefore conceptualize place-based collaborations along three institutional dimensions: control over resources, degree of formalization, and mode of coordination. These dimensions capture who has the capacity to act, how predictable and enforceable the rules are, and how actors coordinate in practice. They provide a common framework for comparing programs that otherwise belong to separate policy and research traditions.

2.3. Who controls resources?

Control over resources affects incentives, transaction costs, and the capacity for collective action (Ostrom, 1990; Williamson, 1985). In place-based collaborations, resources may be centralized within a public authority, pooled among participating actors, or distributed through voluntary contributions. These arrangements differ in their ability to mobilize funding, allocate responsibility, and mitigate free riding.

Centralized resources can support rapid and coordinated action but may limit local influence. Pooled arrangements tie contributions to shared decision-making and can support sustained collaboration, while decentralized and voluntary arrangements offer flexibility but may struggle to mobilize and maintain collective effort. Resource control therefore shapes both the scale of intervention and the capacity of participating actors to pursue agreed objectives.

2.4. Degree of formalization?

Formalization refers to the extent to which rules, roles, and responsibilities are codified and enforceable. Formal institutions reduce uncertainty, structure expectations, and facilitate monitoring and accountability (Greif, 2006; North, 1990). Place-based collaborations range from legally mandated arrangements with defined governance structures to loosely organized initiatives based primarily on informal agreements and social norms.

Greater formalization can clarify responsibilities and make collective efforts more predictable and durable. It can also create rigidity, administrative costs, and barriers to local adaptation. Informal arrangements may draw more effectively on trust, shared norms, and local knowledge, but can be harder to sustain when participation is voluntary or responsibility remains diffuse.

Formalization thus involves a trade-off between predictability and flexibility rather than a simple progression from weaker to stronger governance.

2.5. Mode of coordination

The mode of coordination describes how actors align their decisions and actions. Three broad mechanisms are particularly relevant: hierarchical authority, network-based negotiation, and norm-based coordination (Ostrom, 2010). Hierarchies rely on command and clearly allocated authority, making them well suited to enforcement and rapid response. Networks coordinate interdependent actors through negotiation, information sharing, and joint decision-making. Norm-based arrangements depend on shared values, peer influence, and informal social control. The importance of coordination structures is illustrated by Roggero and Thiel (2018), who show how differences in formal and informal coordination within local administrations shape collective responses to cross-cutting problems. Although their analysis concerns climate adaptation, the underlying coordination problem is also relevant to place-based collaboration, where organizationally distinct actors must manage interdependencies across policy domains.

Place-based collaborations commonly combine the mechanisms, but their relative importance varies. Police-centered interventions rely primarily on hierarchy; integrated collaborations make greater use of networks and formal joint decision-making; and school- or community-based programs rely more heavily on norm formation. The dominant coordination mechanism affects both how an intervention operates and which types of collective action problems it can address.

2.6. Linking institutional design to outcomes

The three dimensions jointly shape implementation, outcomes, and evaluability. Formalized arrangements with centralized or pooled resources and structured coordination may be better equipped to produce visible short-term effects, particularly where the central problem concerns enforcement or coordination. Decentralized and norm-based initiatives may instead operate through gradual changes in behavior, trust, or informal social control.

Differences in reported effectiveness may consequently reflect both substantive impacts and differences in observability. Evaluating what works therefore requires attention not only to program content, but also to the institutional structures through which resources are mobilized, decisions are made, and collective action is sustained.

3. Literature Review and Program Classification

The review proceeds in four steps, summarized in Figure 1. It is not a formal systematic review in the PRISMA sense, but a structured and theory-informed mapping of evidence. First, searches of the academic and grey literature, supplemented by backward and forward citation tracking, identified ten established program models that organize collaboration among multiple actors to address localized collective action problems. Second, we classified these models

according to their institutional features. Third, we reviewed the available evaluation literature associated with each model. Finally, we synthesized the evidence by relating institutional design to observed outcomes in crime and safety, local economic activity, and place attractiveness.

Figure 1 about here

The three dimensions outlined in Section 2—resource control, degree of formalization, and mode of coordination—allow us to classify the ten program models into four broad categories: integrated collaborations, police-centered interventions, school-based programs, and community-based initiatives. This approach treats programs not as unique cases or black boxes, but as configurations of institutional rules and mechanisms that can be specified, compared, and evaluated (Rossi et al., 2004; Ostrom, 2010). Table 1 summarizes the resulting typology.

Table 1 about here

The four categories represent distinct institutional responses to collective action problems. Integrated collaborations combine pooled or coordinated resources with formal governance across multiple actors. Police-centered interventions rely primarily on centralized authority and hierarchical coordination. School-based programs use established organizational structures to support norm-based coordination over time, while community-based initiatives depend more heavily on voluntary participation, decentralized resources, and informal norms.

These differences also affect evaluability. Highly formalized programs with centralized or pooled resources tend to produce more visible and measurable short-term outcomes. The effects of decentralized and norm-based initiatives may be slower, more diffuse, and harder to capture using standard evaluation methods. Differences in the available evidence should therefore not be interpreted solely as differences in effectiveness. Table 2 summarizes the programs and their evidence base, after which each category is examined in greater detail.

Table 2 about here

3.1. Integrated place-based programs

Integrated place-based programs represent the most formalized and rule-bound form of local collaboration. They typically combine stable organizational structures, explicit responsibilities, routinized information flows, and dedicated or coordinated resources across public, private, and civil-society actors. These features can reduce coordination failures and support sustained action, but may also limit inclusiveness and adaptability when public-sector or commercial priorities dominate. Compared with other forms of place-based collaboration, both their effects and their implementation tend to be relatively well documented.

3.1.1. Focused deterrence programs

Focused deterrence programs target serious crime among chronic offenders, particularly gangs and criminal networks (Braga & Kennedy, 2021). Law enforcement agencies, social services, probation authorities, schools, and community representatives coordinate a message combining deterrence and support: further violence will trigger concentrated sanctions, while participants are offered social, educational, and employment-related assistance. A central component is the “call-in,” through which this message is communicated directly to individuals and groups considered at high risk of involvement in violence (Kennedy, 2006).

Institutionally, focused deterrence represents a highly formalized and centrally coordinated arrangement in which multiple agencies align their actions to produce a credible signal. The most prominent example is Group Violence Intervention (GVI), although similar approaches have also been applied to open-air drug markets (Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy & Wong, 2009; Rostami et al., 2023). Meta-analyses indicate reductions in firearm violence of around 25 percent and in drug-related crime of roughly one-third, with limited evidence of displacement (Braga et al., 2018; Makarios & Pratt, 2012; Rostami et al., 2023). However, effectiveness depends on implementation fidelity and perceived legitimacy, and overly punitive implementation may be counterproductive (Griffiths & Christian, 2015).

3.1.2. Business Improvement Districts

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are geographically defined collaborations in which businesses and/or property owners collectively finance and govern improvements in a commercial area through a mandatory or voluntary levy (Peel & Lloyd, 2005). BID organizations commonly provide services such as security, maintenance, place management, and improvements to public space, while coordinating businesses, municipalities, police, transport authorities, and civil-society actors. Through greater pedestrian activity, environmental maintenance, and informal guardianship, they seek to strengthen both safety and local economic attractiveness, consistent with Jacobs’ (1961) “eyes on the street” logic (MacDonald et al., 2010; Han et al., 2017).

Institutionally, BIDs combine decentralized local control with stable, earmarked resources and formal governance, creating semi-autonomous nodes within a broader polycentric system. Most quantitative evaluations report reductions in crime (Moir et al., 2024), including estimated decreases of 12 percent in robbery and 8 percent in violent crime in Los Angeles (MacDonald et al., 2010). Some studies nevertheless find increased crime risks, potentially because greater activity also increases target density (Clutter et al., 2019). This illustrates a central trade-off: measures that increase economic activity may also create additional crime opportunities unless accompanied by sufficient guardianship.

3.1.3. Communities That Care (CTC)

Communities That Care (CTC) is a long-term prevention framework through which municipalities, schools, police, social services, healthcare providers, parents, and community

organizations coordinate interventions targeting youth risk behaviors (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Rather than prescribing a single intervention, CTC uses recurring local data to identify risk and protective factors and select evidence-based measures suited to local conditions (Hawkins et al., 2018).

CTC combines relatively high formalization with decentralized multi-actor coordination. Standardized assessments and planning procedures provide a shared basis for decision-making, while implementation remains locally adapted and distributed across participating organizations. Experimental and longitudinal evidence indicates that CTC can reduce youth delinquency and related outcomes, including adolescent handgun carrying (Hawkins et al., 2018; Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2023). Direct evidence on economic outcomes is lacking, although improvements in safety, stability, and youth development may generate indirect local benefits.

3.1.4. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) seeks to reduce crime opportunities by modifying the built environment and the management of public space (Cozens & Love, 2015). Measures such as improved lighting, visibility, maintenance, access control, and surveillance are commonly incorporated into urban planning, housing management, commercial development, and broader place-management initiatives (The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, 2024; Brottsförebyggande Rådet 2025). The underlying logic is that environmental design can influence offender decision-making and strengthen informal guardianship by increasing visibility, territoriality, and the perceived risk of detection (Clarke, 2005).

CPTED relies on distributed governance among planners, municipalities, property owners, businesses, and local managers. It is often formalized through planning standards but less centrally coordinated than the other integrated models and is commonly embedded within broader strategies such as BIDs or municipal safety programs. Meta-analyses indicate that improved street lighting reduces crime by roughly one-fifth, while CCTV also produces crime-reducing effects (Farrington & Welsh, 2002; Welsh & Farrington, 2009). Causal identification is nevertheless difficult because CPTED measures are frequently implemented as part of broader intervention packages (Cozens & Love, 2015). Despite plausible links to improved local economic conditions and place attractiveness, these outcomes have not been directly evaluated.

3.2. Police-centered interventions

Police-centered interventions concentrate enforcement resources in high-crime locations and are typically grounded in situational crime prevention. Institutionally, they combine centralized authority, vertically controlled resources, and strong enforcement capacity. Although other actors may participate, coordination generally remains anchored in the police organization. These features enable rapid responses and relatively robust short-term crime reduction, but

provide less capacity to reshape broader neighborhood conditions. Effectiveness also depends heavily on implementation quality and procedural legitimacy.

3.2.1. Hot Spots Policing

Hot spots policing concentrates police presence and enforcement in small geographic areas with disproportionately high levels of crime (Weisburd, 2015). Strategies are typically guided by crime mapping and may include intensified patrols, increased officer visibility, and targeted enforcement in micro-locations such as street corners, transit hubs, or commercial corridors (Braga et al., 2019). While some applications involve collaboration with businesses, municipalities, or property owners, operational authority generally remains centralized within the police organization.

Meta-analyses indicate that hot spots policing reduces crime by roughly one-fifth on average, with particularly strong effects on violent offenses (Braga et al., 2014, 2019; Turchan & Braga, 2024). Rather than simply displacing crime, these effects may diffuse into surrounding areas (Bowers et al., 2011; Higginson et al., 2014). No studies have directly assessed the economic effects of hot spots policing, although reduced concentrations of crime could plausibly generate indirect benefits for local property values and economic activity.

3.2.2. Problem-Oriented Policing (POP)

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) is an analytical strategy for identifying and addressing the underlying causes of recurring crime and disorder (Goldstein, 1990). It is commonly operationalized through the SARA model—Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment—which emphasizes iterative problem identification, intervention, and evaluation (Hinkle et al., 2020). Responses may combine targeted enforcement with environmental redesign, regulatory changes, or collaboration with municipalities, schools, property owners, and businesses.

Institutionally, POP combines centralized police authority with more decentralized and adaptive coordination than conventional enforcement strategies. Meta-analyses indicate average crime reductions of approximately 20–30 percent, particularly when the full SARA process is implemented (Braga et al., 2019, 2024; Hinkle et al., 2020; Keenan, 2025). Outcomes depend on the quality of the initial analysis, the appropriateness of the response, and coordination with relevant stakeholders. As with hot spots policing, direct evidence on economic outcomes is currently lacking.

3.3. School-based and norm-shaping interventions

School-based programs use established organizational structures to influence behavior, social norms, and peer relations over time. Institutionally, they combine formalized routines and embedded school resources with norm-based coordination among students, staff, and sometimes external actors. Schools provide continuity and organizational legitimacy, but the effects of these programs may emerge gradually and their reach beyond the school environment is often limited.

3.3.1. Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a school-based program centered on bystander intervention and peer influence (Katz, 2018). Older students are trained to lead discussions and exercises with younger students on violence, bullying, harassment, gender norms, and abusive behavior. Through practical scenarios, participants learn to recognize harmful situations and intervene safely as active bystanders (Katz et al., 2011). The program is integrated into school routines and may involve collaboration with social services, police, parents, and civil-society organizations.

Institutionally, MVP relies less on formalized inter-organizational governance and pooled resources than on pedagogical routines and norm-based coordination within the school. This may support sustained preventive work by strengthening empathy, self-efficacy, and willingness to intervene (Katz, 2018; Storer et al., 2015). Its limited reach beyond the school setting, however, constrains its capacity to affect broader neighborhood conditions directly.

Evaluations indicate improvements in attitudes toward violence and gender norms, as well as greater confidence in bystander intervention (Cissner, 2009; Katz et al., 2011; Ward, 2002). Evidence of changes in actual behavior and spillovers to younger students is weaker, with some studies finding no statistically significant effects among mentees (Butler et al., 2024). Evidence concerning long-term effects on serious violence or crime also remains limited, partly because evaluations commonly rely on self-reported attitudes and short follow-up periods. No studies have examined economic outcomes or broader place attractiveness.

3.3.2. KiVa

KiVa is a structured anti-bullying program developed in Finland that combines universal prevention with targeted responses to specific incidents (Kärnä et al., 2011). It uses classroom lessons, teacher training, and defined intervention procedures to change group dynamics, reduce passive acceptance of bullying, and strengthen peer support for victims (Huitsing et al., 2020). Designated school teams investigate reported incidents and monitor implementation and outcomes.

KiVa represents a more formalized variant of norm-based prevention than MVP, combining standardized procedures and defined organizational roles with interventions directed at peer norms. A large randomized controlled trial found significant reductions in bullying and victimization, and subsequent evaluations have reported positive effects across different national contexts (Huitsing et al., 2020; Kärnä et al., 2011; Nocentini & Menesini, 2016). Outcomes nevertheless depend on sustained implementation and adherence to program design (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2020). Although bullying victimization is associated with later violent and antisocial behavior, studies have not directly established whether KiVa reduces serious violence or criminal offending. Nor has the program's effect on economic outcomes or broader place attractiveness been evaluated.

3.4. Community-based interventions

Community-based interventions seek to strengthen informal social control, trust, and guardianship by mobilizing residents and other local actors. They represent the least formalized category of place-based collaboration, relying primarily on voluntary participation, distributed resources, shared norms, and informal accountability. These features can provide local knowledge, legitimacy, and adaptability, but also make the programs vulnerable to declining participation, diffuse responsibility, and limited organizational durability.

3.4.1. Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch programs mobilize residents to increase informal surveillance and cooperate with police and other local actors to prevent crime (Holloway et al., 2008). Participants are typically encouraged to observe and report suspicious activity, improve home security, share information, and strengthen collective vigilance. Programs may also use neighborhood meetings, signage, communication networks, and community activities to reinforce local trust and social cohesion.

Institutionally, Neighborhood Watch is a low-formality, citizen-led arrangement based on voluntary participation and norm-based coordination. Meta-analyses indicate crime reductions of approximately 16–26 percent, particularly for property crimes such as burglary (Ekici et al., 2022; Holloway et al., 2008). Effects appear strongest in well-organized programs with clear participation structures, illustrating how some degree of formalization may help sustain voluntary collective action. No studies have directly examined economic effects.

3.4.2. Safety walks

Safety walks are participatory assessments in which residents, municipal officials, police, property owners, and businesses jointly inspect public spaces perceived as unsafe (Cozens et al., 2022). Participants identify environmental conditions such as poor lighting, obstructed visibility, vandalism, and neglected public spaces, and use their observations to inform planning, maintenance, or safety measures.

Rather than standalone crime-prevention programs, safety walks function primarily as low-cost coordination and information-sharing mechanisms. Institutionally, they combine voluntary participation and local knowledge with limited formalization and organizational permanence. Evidence of direct crime-reduction effects is scarce; existing studies instead identify process-related benefits such as improved collaboration, resident engagement, and more systematic collection of place-based knowledge (Cozens et al., 2022; Sahlin Lilja, 2024). Safety walks are therefore best understood as components of broader place-based strategies rather than independent interventions..

3.5. Summary of evidence

The four categories reveal a clear relationship between institutional design, observed outcomes, and the strength of the available evidence. Integrated programs combine formal governance with shared or coordinated resources and generally show substantial crime-reduction effects. BIDs also provide the clearest evidence of effects on local economic activity and property values. Police-centered interventions similarly produce relatively strong and consistent reductions in crime, particularly in high-crime locations, but their wider economic effects have rarely been studied.

School-based programs operate through norm formation within established organizational structures. Their evaluations generally find improvements in attitudes and behavior, although evidence of effects on serious crime and conditions beyond the school setting is limited. Community-based programs rely more heavily on voluntary participation and informal coordination. Neighborhood Watch has demonstrated crime-reducing effects, whereas Safety Walks have primarily been associated with process outcomes such as engagement, collaboration, and improved local knowledge.

Overall, formalized and resource-intensive interventions have generated the strongest and most measurable evidence of crime reduction. This should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that they are inherently more effective. Their organizational boundaries, implementation procedures, and outcomes are generally easier to observe and evaluate. Norm-based and community-led processes may instead produce slower and more diffuse effects that are difficult to capture through conventional evaluation designs. The evidence therefore reflects both substantive differences in effectiveness and an institutional trade-off between organizational capacity and local embeddedness. Across all four categories, evidence concerning local economic activity and place attractiveness remains scarce.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Discussion

This study has developed an institutional framework for comparing place-based collaborations and synthesized evidence on their effects on crime and safety, local economic activity, and place attractiveness. The framework shifts attention from program labels to the rules, resource structures, and coordination mechanisms through which collective action is organized. It thereby helps explain why interventions addressing related local problems may differ in their implementation, outcomes, and evaluability.

The comparison reveals a recurring trade-off between organizational capacity and local embeddedness. Formalized and resource-intensive arrangements are generally better equipped to coordinate multiple actors, sustain collective efforts, and produce measurable effects. Less formalized initiatives may instead benefit from local knowledge, trust, and adaptability, but often face greater difficulties in mobilizing resources, maintaining participation, and

establishing clear accountability. Neither configuration is inherently superior. Their relative effectiveness depends on the collective action problem being addressed and the institutional context in which collaboration occurs.

The evidence is strongest for crime and safety outcomes. Focused deterrence, BIDs, hot spots policing, problem-oriented policing, and several other interventions have produced substantial crime reductions. Evidence concerning local economic activity and place attractiveness is considerably more limited, with BIDs constituting the main exception. School- and community-based programs have more often been evaluated in terms of attitudes, behavior, engagement, or informal social control than serious crime or economic outcomes.

These differences partly reflect variation in evaluability. Programs with clear organizational boundaries, formal implementation procedures, and immediate outcomes are more amenable to conventional impact evaluation. Decentralized and norm-based initiatives may generate slower, more diffuse, and context-dependent effects that are difficult to isolate. The relative strength of the evidence should therefore not be interpreted solely as a ranking of substantive effectiveness. It also reflects how institutional design shapes what can be observed and measured.

The analysis has two principal limitations. First, its focus on impact evaluations means that the extensive process-oriented literature on collaboration has not been reviewed systematically. Cooperation, institutional learning, and improved coordination may be important outcomes in their own right and may also mediate longer-term effects. Second, the review does not examine legitimacy, trust, representation, and participation in depth. These dimensions are likely to influence whether place-based collaborations remain sustainable and socially embedded, particularly where formal authority and resource control are concentrated among a limited set of actors.

Despite these limitations, the institutional perspective offers a basis for more systematic comparison across programs, places, and national settings. Place-based collaboration is not simply a collection of interventions, but a governance form whose effects depend on how authority, resources, rules, and responsibilities are configured. Recognizing this variation is essential for understanding not only whether collaboration works, but under what institutional conditions particular models are likely to remain effective and legitimate.

4.2. Implications for future research

Future research should first incorporate institutional design more explicitly into empirical evaluation. Existing studies commonly estimate program effects without examining how governance structures, financing arrangements, decision rules, and accountability shape implementation and outcomes. Comparative studies across programs, cities, or countries could identify which institutional features account for variation among otherwise similar interventions.

Second, evaluations should include a broader range of outcomes. The current literature is heavily concentrated on crime and safety, while business activity, employment, property values, and place attractiveness remain underexplored. Studying these outcomes over longer periods would clarify whether safety improvements generate wider economic change and whether economic development, in turn, reinforces or undermines crime reduction.

Third, greater attention should be paid to mechanisms, temporal dynamics, and local context. Average treatment effects reveal little about whether interventions operate through deterrence, guardianship, norm formation, organizational learning, or changes in economic activity. Mixed-method and process-oriented approaches can complement randomized and quasi-experimental designs by identifying how effects emerge, why they differ across places, and whether they persist.

Finally, future evaluations should examine legitimacy, trust, representation, and participation alongside conventional outcomes. These factors may be particularly important for understanding the long-term sustainability of place-based collaboration and the trade-off between organizational capacity and local embeddedness. Incorporating them would allow researchers to assess not only whether interventions produce measurable effects, but also whether the institutional arrangements supporting those effects are durable and locally legitimate.

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Figures and tables

Figure 1. Framework for the structured literature review

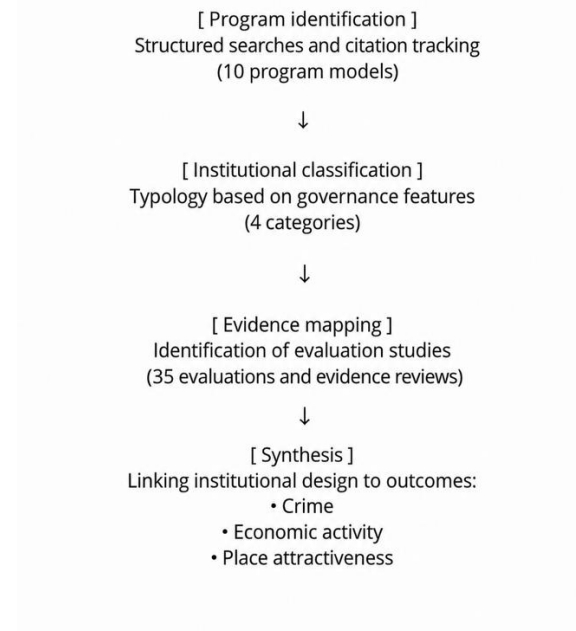


Table 1. Typology of programs

Program type	Resources	Formalization	Coordination logic
Integrated	Shared / pooled	High	Hybrid (rules + coordination)
Police-centered	Centralized (state)	High	Hierarchical
School-based	Institutional (school system)	Medium-high	Norm-based within formal structure
Community-based	Distributed / voluntary	Low	Informal / norm-driven

Table 2. Detailed summary of place-based collaborations covered

Program	Institutional features	Effects on crime/safety, business activity, and place attractiveness
1. Integrated programs		
Focused deterrence/GVI. Violence-prevention program coordinating police, social services, and civil society to reach criminal groups and offer support while communicating clear consequences.	Represents a highly formalized and authority-centered collaborative arrangement, where multiple agencies coordinate under shared rules to produce coherent signals of deterrence and support.	Meta-analyses report substantial reductions in violent and firearm-related crime, while evaluations of drug-market interventions also indicate reductions in drug-related crime. Effects depend on implementation, and the available evidence generally provides little indication of spatial displacement (Braga et al., 2018; Braga & Kennedy, 2021; Rostami et al., 2023).
BIDs (Business Improvement Districts). A collaboration model where property owners and businesses jointly finance and implement safety and development measures in a specific geographical area.	Semi-autonomous, business-led governance units with dedicated financing and formal decision rules, creating a stable local node within a broader polycentric system.	Most quantitative studies report either reductions in crime or no significant effects (Moir et al., 2024). Los Angeles BIDs were associated with estimated reductions of 12% in robbery and 8% in violent crime, although the estimates were statistically uncertain (MacDonald et al., 2010). Other research indicates that effects can vary across BID types and locations, with some studies finding an increased risk of robbery (Clutter et al., 2019). Evidence on business activity and property values is likewise mixed: positive effects have been reported in some settings (Brooks & Strange, 2011; Jansen, 2017; Sutton, 2014), while a Swedish study found a temporary increase in labour productivity but mostly insignificant effects on safety and property values (Daunfeldt et al., 2024). Negative effects on residential property values have also been documented (Hirao, 2021).
CTC (Communities That Care). A long-term framework in which local actors map risk and protective factors for children and young people and select evidence-based interventions accordingly.	A long-term, community-centered governance framework that structures collaboration through standardized assessments, shared planning, and evidence-based rule systems.	A cluster RCT found reductions in adolescent handgun carrying of 27% at a specific follow-up and 24% cumulatively through grade 12 (Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2023). Other experimental and longitudinal evidence indicates reductions in youth delinquency and related outcomes (Hawkins et al., 2018).
CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). A model for designing and modifying the physical environment to reduce crime and increase perceived safety.	Embeds collaboration into the planning system by formalizing expectations about how actors manage and maintain public space, linking environmental design to collective guardianship.	International meta-analyses show that environmental changes such as improved lighting reduce crime by about 21% (Farrington & Welsh, 2002). CCTV and integrated place design also show documented effects (Welsh & Farrington, 2009; Cozens & Love, 2015).
2. School-based and norm-shaping prevention		
MVP (Mentors in Violence Prevention). School program training students to act as positive bystanders and counter harmful norms.	Leverages the school as a central coordination hub, aligning educators, students, and external partners within a shared normative framework for early prevention.	Studies report improvements in attitudes, knowledge, and perceived efficacy related to bystander intervention, although effect sizes and measures vary across evaluations (Ward, 2002; Cissner, 2009; Katz et al., 2011; Butler et al., 2024).

KiVa. Finnish anti-bullying program combining instruction, adult support, and structured responses to incidents.	A highly standardized, school-anchored governance model in which the responsibility for norm shaping and conflict resolution is embedded in clear procedural rules.	A cluster RCT involving 78 schools found significant reductions in bullying and victimization after nine months (Kärnä et al., 2011). Positive effects have also been reported in Italy and the Netherlands (Nocentini & Menesini, 2016; Huitsing et al., 2020), although outcomes depend on implementation fidelity (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2020).
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3. Police-centered interventions

Hot Spots Policing. Police strategy concentrating resources in small geographic locations with high crime levels.	Reflects a centralized authority model that can become collaborative only when embedded in broader local partnerships and shared problem-solving structures.	International meta-analyses show approximately 20% crime reductions in high-crime areas, especially violent crime (Braga et al., 2014, 2019; Turchan & Braga, 2024). No evidence of displacement.
PoP (Problem-Oriented Policing). A method where police and local actors identify and analyze recurring problems to develop long-term solutions.	A structured problem-solving framework that integrates police authority with multi-actor analysis and adaptive rule-making to address recurring local problems.	Meta-analyses generally find meaningful crime reductions, although effect sizes vary across interventions and implementation contexts (Hinkle et al., 2020; Keenan, 2025).

4. Community- and neighborhood-based interventions

Neighborhood Watch. Residents cooperate with police and municipalities to reduce crime through increased vigilance and information-sharing.	A low-formality, citizen-led governance structure that relies on voluntary engagement, shared norms, and informal accountability mechanisms.	Meta-analytic evidence indicates that Neighborhood Watch is associated with crime reductions of approximately 16–26 percent (Holloway et al., 2008). A broader meta-analysis of community-policing interventions, including Neighborhood Watch, likewise reports an overall reduction in crime (Ekici et al., 2022).
Safety Walks. Method where residents, municipalities, and police jointly identify unsafe locations and propose improvements.	Participatory governance practices that generate shared situational awareness and local legitimacy, though with limited organizational durability.	No robust quantitative evidence of crime reduction has been identified. Safety walks are primarily used as participatory tools for identifying local safety problems and informing environmental measures.
