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OPINION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE OFFICERS ON COMMUNITY POLICING

The theoretical part of the paper discusses the problem-solving approach in local communities and provides an explanation of the differences between traditional policing methods and the modern problem-oriented community policing. The paper presents the principles of community policing which developed in western countries also because of the growing gap and poor cooperation between the police and the community. The success of community policing is founded on full partnership between police organisations and communities and their mutual support. Further, the paper concentrates on the situation concerning community policing in Slovenia. A special emphasis has been laid on the work of neighbourhood police officers in Slovenia.

The empirical part is grounded on the surveys completed by 266 neighbourhood police officers in 2003. The respondents were interviewed by the authors who pursued to obtain the answers to the following set of questions:

- *To what extent are neighbourhood police officers cognizant of the basic police regulations on community policing?*
- *To what extent are they content with these police regulations on community policing?*
- *To what extent are they satisfied with their policing?*
- *How do they estimate their policing tasks?*
- *How do they estimate their cooperation with consultative bodies of local communities?*

The paper endeavours to provide answers to the questions above.

INTRODUCTION

Community policing

The first ideas about community policing have emerged in the United States of America between 1914 and 1919. Because of the increasing technological development the gap between police and community has increased (Cordner and Hale, 1992). The enhanced technology had a positive influence on the effectiveness of the police force but it also caused its alienation from the community (Palmiotto, 2000).

This has not produced the expected results, which is why an idea emerged to solve the security issues within the community in cooperation with the police (Palmiotto, 2000).

Community policing started to appear in the literature in the beginning of 1980s (Miller, 1999). Community policing is based on discussion and cooperation between community and police in order to achieve consensus on security issues. For police to be able to react to the problems community is facing they need to understand community's needs (Rosenbaum, 1994). This collaboration enables police and citizens to solve the security concerns together.

Solving the problems is the most important part of community policing (Meško, 2001). Therefore, one can describe it as problem directed police work in community. Supporters of this method stress its many advantages.

The problem directed police work is complementary to the repressive work of police as well as it enables activities that prevent criminal activities and other community hazards. Community policing is based on citizen self-protection with intensive police cooperation (Meško, 2002).

Community policing in European Union member states

The countries with the longest community policing tradition are Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other member states have started to implement this system after the year 1990. Some countries practice community policing at all levels while others have special police officers that exclusively practice community policing and work only on crime prevention. In France, for example, community policing officers distinguish themselves from others by the stripes on their uniforms. However, the "special" community police officers have experienced reputation gain from the community but lost it with their co-workers in most of the countries practicing this type of policing.

Development of community policing in Slovenia

After the year 1990 there has been a change in police work philosophy in Slovenia. In 1995 the reorganization of police in Slovenia took place. At that time new job positions of neighbourhood police officers were created, whose job entails mostly of crime prevention.

The new Police Act (1998) states that the police force has to cooperate with local communities when dealing with local security. Also in Police Code of Conduct (2000) the cooperation between police and local communities is especially mentioned.

Police districts and neighbourhood police officers

Police districts are sections of the area covered by police station. Police districts are made to carry out the police duties where cooperation between police officers and representatives of community at securing peace and order has an important role. Police districts cover the size of one or more municipalities or in cases of big municipalities there are several police districts in one municipality.

In police districts the assignments are carried out by a leader of the police district. As a part of their duties, the leader actively cooperates with other police officers, members of the community, the representatives of local community, members of different organizations, representatives of economic entities and others. The focal point of their work is prevention (Žaberl, 2000).

METHOD

Purpose of this study

The purpose of our survey was to study the evaluation of police work in community executed by leaders of police districts. The goal of the survey was to find out how much do leaders of police districts know and evaluate the basic laws regulating community policing and how do they evaluate current status of community policing in police stations.

Sampling

Slovenian police has 307 systemized working places of leaders of police districts. The survey included 177 of them and it was conducted through a questionnaire they received between November 3rd and December 5th 2003.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was structured in the way that interviewees had to evaluate conformity between prescribed tasks of their work and their actual performance. The first part of the questionnaire gathered demographic data and the second was made of the following eight sections:

- How well do they know the basic laws for executing community policing?
- How satisfied are they with basic laws of community policing?
- How satisfied are they with their work?
- How do they evaluate the organization of their work?
- How do they plan their work, identify problems in community and prepare analysis?
- How do they evaluate cooperation with communities at securing peace and order?
- How well do they know different forms of community policing and evaluate the needs for certain knowledge?
- What improvements do they recommend for more successful work?

Interviewees responded by evaluating different statements on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant very poor, 2 poor, 3 mediocre, 4 good and 5 very good. In the demographical part they wrote the data requested or circled the answers.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the demographic data

The sample contained 177 interviewees, 3 of them were women, and 174 were men. On average they were 36,1 years old. Less than a half of them (49,7%) were less than 35 years old. The majority had high school education (170), interviewees with finished higher education follow (4), the least interviewees have finished higher professional education (3). The respondents acquired their education by completing three or four year long educational training at the police cadet school. These are followed by respondents that gained their education by completing a shorter program at the same school after they have already completed some other school (44) and there were 44 of those who have successfully pre-qualified after completing a high school degree.

How well do they know the basic laws for executing community policing?

Firstly, we were interested in the level of knowledge the respondents have on the contents of the laws that define community policing. Gathered data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Recognition of basic laws

CLAIM/ VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Medium term police plan	2,36	0,97
Philosophy of community policing	3,18	0,97
Strategy of community policing	3,47	0,87
Guidelines for prevention work	3,83	0,80
Instructions for documentation of preventive work	3,85	0,84

How satisfied are they with basic laws of community policing?

Secondly, we were interested in the satisfaction of the respondents with basic laws of community policing. Gathered data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Satisfaction with basic laws

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Strategy for work in local communities	2,86	0,92
Guidelines for execution of prevention work	3,15	0,83
Satisfaction with instructions for documentation of preventive work	3,01	0,92
Satisfaction with written and oral instructions from police directorate	2,71	0,80
Satisfaction with written and oral instructions from police station management	3,17	0,92

How satisfied are they with their work?

Thirdly, we were interested in the satisfaction of the respondents with their work at police stations. Furthermore, we were interested in how their role is understood by their co workers, and what is their opinion of the value of their work. Gathered data is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Satisfaction with work

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Satisfaction with work at the police station	3,42	0,86
Satisfaction with their own work	3,75	0,88
Motivation for work	3,63	0,97
Co-workers' understanding of the role of the neighbourhood police officer	2,62	1,12
Police managers' understanding of the role of the neighbourhood police officer	2,62	1,21
Value of work of the neighbourhood police officer	2,84	0,94

How do they evaluate the organization of their work?

We were also interested how the respondents are assigned to work at police districts and how well do they know the residents that live in the district. Moreover, we were interested in knowing whether they really execute the preventive work and if they do what sort of transportation do they use. Gathered data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Organization of work of the neighbourhood police officer

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Work assignment in the police district	3,90	1,07
Familiarity with the people that live in the district	4,67	0,54
Performing the preventive work	3,26	1,07
Performing police tasks on foot	2,42	1,00
Performing other police tasks	3,06	1,04

How do they plan their work, identify problems in community and prepare analysis?

We were also interested to know how respondents analyse security situations and endangerment of residents. In addition, we were interested in how satisfied they are with

the cooperation of citizens and if they actually plan the work together. Gathered data is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Planning of work, identification of problems and analysis

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Analyzing the security measures inside the district	3,85	0,80
Preparing of analyses about causes and levels of endangerment of residents	2,84	0,97
Support of residents at identifying the problems	3,59	0,88
Collective planning of work	3,54	0,93

How do they evaluate cooperation with communities at securing peace and order?

In this segment we wanted to know how the respondents evaluate the suitability of legislation determining executive bodies of local communities. Furthermore, we wanted to know if local communities want to cooperate and if the respondents actively cooperate in the work of these executive bodies. Gathered data is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Evaluation of work in executive bodies of local communities

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Legislative acts are good for working within local communities	2,80	0,83
Local communities pay attention to problems	1,78	1,02
Active cooperation in the work of executive bodies	2,66	1,31

How well do they know different forms of community policing and evaluate the needs for increasing knowledge?

In the next segment of questions we wanted to know in what way and to what extent do respondents use prescribed forms of work and methods of community policing. Furthermore, we were interested to know if they are qualified enough for their work or is there anything setting them back. Gathered data is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Evaluation of work and methods of community policing and recognition of new knowledge needed

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
The most important form of preventive work is counselling and advising	4,07	0,84
Suitable qualification for project work	2,09	0,82
Participation at sport, cultural and other social events in police district	2,88	1,02
Regulations and directions of police are a obstacle for work on the field of public and media relations	2,56	0,95
Enough educational expertise for lecturing	2,36	1,04
Enough technical supplies for lecturing	1,02	0,97
Public tribunes should be done by police directorate	3,63	1,16

What are the measures they recommend for more successful work?

Finally, we asked the respondents if they agree with certain prepositions of changes that should improve current status of work in the field of leaders of police districts. Gathered data is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: The need for certain changes

CLAIM / VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
The reduction of police district size	2,54	1,40
The neighbourhood police officer needs a second in command	3,30	1,39
The neighbourhood police officer needs to be less involved in repressive work	4,02	1,10
The neighbourhood police officer needs to get a renewed job description	3,22	1,18
The neighbourhood police officer needs to be relived from clerical work	3,76	1,08
The neighbourhood police officer needs to be more present in police district	4,13	1,06
Changes are not necessary	2,37	1,28

Correlation analysis

At the next step we were interested to know if age has any significant influence with some of the variables. Some more interesting correlations are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Correlations with some variables

CLAIM / VARIABLE	AGE
Basis for successful and effective work is knowing people that live in the area of police district	0,186*
Most of the time I do preventive work in police district	0,204*
Many times I do other police related jobs	- 0,182*
Monitoring and analysing security measures in the community is essential for this work	0,163*
Community assists at identifying problems	0,196*
Good legislation is a basis for work in executive bodies	0,189*
Lack of ability for team work	-0,193*
Frequent participation at sport, cultural and other social events	0,193*
Enough educational expertise for lecturing	-0,207*
Enough technical supplies for lecturing	-0,255*
Changes are not necessary	0,226*

* = p < 0, 05

It is seen from the Table 9 that the age of respondents has a positive correlation with seven and negative correlation with four claims. Older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to positively evaluate the following claims:

- that for successful and effective work knowing the people that live in police district is critical,
- that most of their working time they do preventive work in police district,
- that the foundation for performing effectively is monitoring and analysing security measures in community,
- that they have huge support from residents of local community at identifying problems,

- that they have firm legislative foundation in executive bodies,
- that they participate in sport, cultural and other social events,
- that changes are not necessary.

We can also see from the Table 9 that older respondents are less likely than younger respondents to positively evaluate the next claims:

- that they often perform other police assignments,
- that they are under qualified for projective work,
- that they are not qualified for lecturing,
- that they do not have enough technical support for lecturing.

DISCUSSION

We have found that knowledge of basic laws defining community policing is very good among community police officers. This is critical because it represents the foundation for their work. Nevertheless, the leaders of police districts have relatively poor knowledge of mid-term police development documentation. Similar survey (Kosmač, 2004), has shown that local police chiefs think that leaders of police districts know this documents fairly well. This shows us the need for local police chiefs to actively ensure that leaders of police districts will actually be familiar with these documents.

Leaders of police districts are satisfied with their work. They evaluate that their co-workers do not understand their role inside police organization as they should. They claim, that they know people that live inside police district, that they are scheduled daily to work inside the district and that they mostly perform preventive tasks. They also say that they have to perform other police work every day and that they do not walk on every day duties. Somewhat different opinion comes from local police chiefs (Kosmač, 2004). They evaluate that leaders of police districts do repressive work only on a very small scale and that they mostly perform their work walking. These differences should be reduced as much as possible while considering the explicit police laws defining community policing. For example, these laws say that leaders of police districts should mostly perform preventive acts and do their work on foot. Chiefs of police stations should try to explain the important role of preventive work to other police officers, because the roles of leaders of police districts that do preventive work reflects very much in success of a police station as a whole.

Leaders of police districts say that they frequently analyse security circumstances at police district and they also say that conditions in this field are generally bad. Leaders of police districts claim that local communities pay little attention to organizing local executive bodies. Furthermore, they say that local communities are not even prepared to engage in activities of already made local executive bodies. Similar survey (Kosmač, 2004) has shown, that local police chiefs do agree in some areas with leaders of police districts, but in some other areas they do not agree at all. Local police chiefs agree when discussing the lack of attention to organizing local executive bodies, but they think that leaders of police districts work with these bodies as they should. This statement is somewhat frightening because the answers of local police chiefs and the answers of leaders of police districts are not consistent. That means that local police chiefs should try harder to make some real and not just declarative cooperation between leaders of police districts and local communities.

Neighbourhood police officers feel the need for extra knowledge's. Kosmač (2004) has in the before mentioned survey concluded that this need for extra education is also felt by local police chiefs. We have to take in consideration that these police chiefs do

not have recourses or means to carry out some additional lessons for neighbourhood police officers. That is why we can recommend to the top police management to try and find some way to qualify neighbourhood police officers.

Leaders of police districts feel the need to be at all times present in police districts. They also express great need to be relieved of repressive work. Local police chiefs find this need to relieve them of repressive work much less important says Kosmač (2004). It is quite obvious that leaders of police districts are quite aware of the need for them to be in local police district and do not bother with repressive work. The local police chiefs are also aware of this same problems but in a far smaller scale. Leaders of police districts work is defined well in different police acts and local police chiefs should improve the conditions of work in order to get reality as close as possible to the desired.

We have determined that among the leaders of police districts there are some statistically important correlations at some evaluations. Older leaders are more satisfied with different segments of community policing, they feel less need for additional education and local police chiefs are less likely to give them repressive work to do. Younger leaders feel a reversed situation. This shows to what is already written in police documentation, where it states that the role of the neighbourhood police officer should be performed by more experienced police officers, who have better ability to communicate to people. At the same time the possibility should be given to younger people to learn what they need to work in this area of police work.

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