

MIKLÓS TIHANYI<sup>1</sup>**The Tools of the Police for the Improvement of the Citizens' Subjective Sense of Security in Hungary****A lakossági szubjektív biztonságérzet javításának rendőri eszközei Magyarországon****Abstract**

*Safety is an elementary human need. The term public safety is a segment of the compound term safety. In a negative approach the lack of public safety can be supposed in actions against the safety of the individuals' life and property. The objective state of public safety can be described through the number of these actions with the aid of criminal statistics. It is a received aspect that public safety is term with a wider representation, since it also covers the individuals' sense of safety. The individual sense of safety is influenced by elements that are independent of objective status described by statistic numbers This thesis aims to exhibit the devices held by poice as the fundamental of public safey that are able to rise the level of the citizens' sense of public safety.*

*Key words: sense of public safety, public sefety, Hungarian Police, Department law enforcement, patrolling*

**Absztrakt**

*A biztonság alapvető emberi szükséglet. A biztonság komplex fogalmának egyik részterületét a közbiztonság kifejezés jellemzi. Negatív megközelítésben a közbiztonság hiánya ragadható meg azokban a cselekményekben, amelyek az egyének élet- és vagyonbiztonságát sértik, illetve veszélyeztetik. A közbiztonság objektív állapota e cselekmények számán keresztül a kriminálstatisztika segítségével írható le. Elfogadott nézet, hogy a közbiztonság ennél szélesebb körben értelmezett fogalom, mert idetartozónak kell érteni az egyének szubjektív közbiztonság érzését is. Ez utóbbit számos olyan tényező befolyásolja, amely a statisztikai számok-*

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*ban kifejezhető objektív állapottól független. A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a rendőrségnek, mint közbiztonság legfőbb letéteményesének milyen eszközök állnak rendelkezésre ahhoz, hogy növelje a társadalom tagjainak közbiztonságérzetét.*

*Kulcsszavak: közbiztonság, közbiztonság érzet, Magyar Rendőrség, közrendvédelem, járőrszolgálat*

## PREMISE

We must state it as an axiom that safety and public safety cannot be considered to be synonymous concepts. Accordingly, we cannot put an equal sign to the subjective sense of security and the subjective sense of public security. Social security and legal certainty play a crucial role in developing the former. As long as the various elements of society don't have an appropriate sense of certainty, of planning ahead, their worldview is permeated by uncertainty. The fear of uncertainty can be considered as a lack of sense of security.

Public safety is a much narrower concept than security or safety in general, although its specific meaning is still being scientifically debated. But it is generally accepted that it is a controlled social system in which the various elements of society can exercise their rights and obligations without external interference factors.

In order to form this, the various intervening systems that try to fend off specifically socially distracting factors play a crucial role. Besides accepting the importance of the role of the police we have to emphasise that public security is a product of society and as such all elements of society must be involved in creating it. It is easy to see that the police by itself is not able to create public safety, therefore it is futile to raise such expectation to the police. So we shall state that the role of the police should be focused on organizing public security. The police has the legal rights and the technical expertise to do this. We believe it is unnecessary to expand the skillset of the police. Every effort in this regard suggests that Hungary is exposed to an increasing security risk. From time to time we may hear voices of a growing terrorist threat, at the same time every factual data suggest that they have no basis in reality. Therefore we believe that any kind of statement from the police regarding the expansion of the actual skillset justified by growing treats to public security is rightfully met with a sense of resentment and fear from the public.

## EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

The police's work on organizing public safety should be and necessary to be evaluated. The two measurements for the evaluation should be the objective and the subjective public safety. Objective public safety is usually described along statistics. An objective measurement could be the number of offences and crimes committed, the number of victims, or the evaluation of value. However we have to admit that public safety cannot be characterized objectively simply based on the crime fighting units' indicators of solved cases since the

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cases that have been solved had already hurt public safety and holding the perpetrators accountable rarely restores the situation to its original state. For example if a murderer is caught, his victim cannot be returned to the family that lost them. We also have to state that there is no direct relation whatsoever between the police's success indicators and the people's subjective sense of public security. The data regarding the effectiveness of the police work could only be used to examine the performance of the police force. The two qualitative expressions of the performance, efficiency and effectiveness should be divided by a strict line. We cannot take the idea of success a real indicator of quality because it only indicates if the police has done something that can be numerically measured. We can say that an action or series of actions is successful if it means that the police action has been completed properly from a legal perspective. But this can be regarded only as a legal result, which means that the police action has resulted in the desired legal outcome. The legal outcome doesn't necessarily mean that the action is indicating actual change in public safety. Therefore the idea of success is not adequate to describe the effect of the police action has on public safety, it only serves to express their legal outcome. The terms efficiency and effectiveness serve better for this purpose. While the former describes the degree of application of measures and tools that brought about the change in public safety, effectiveness explains the degree of change in its status.

Therefore we are not satisfied to measure the quality of police work simply by the numerical data provided. Instead we have to focus on the actual effect of police actions on public safety. Therefore it is necessary to develop the measuring tools for efficiency and effectiveness so that these might appear before the public as the measure of the quality of police work. This solution would help the police's efforts to support the feelings in the public that all of these happen in order to improve public safety.

Besides the objective numbers of public safety the citizen's sense of security may serve as measurement. It is important to emphasize, that with validated surveys this sense of public safety can be examined and expressed well with numbers. Exact studies prove that Hungarian society expect the police to provide protection from acts against public security. Our society is below the European average in terms of the number of people taking care of themselves in regards to safety and security.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is in the best interest of the police to decrease the sense of fear in the population because along with this the social opinion about the police will change as well.

In the following we will review the traditional tools of the police for keeping public order, in order to see if they are fit to help elevate the subjective sense of security of the population.

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<sup>2</sup> Barabás Tünde – Irk Ferenc – Kovács Róbert (szerk.): Félelem, bűnözés és bűnmegelőzés Európa öt nagyvárosában. OKRI, Budapest, 2005

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## GUARDING AND PATROLLING

The purpose of the guarding and patrolling services in public places is to prevent crime by being physically present, or once the crime has happened, to be able to react immediately to the threat to public safety. Both functions have elements that are suitable for increasing the sense of public security.

We have come across views regarding the police presence that claim: “more policemen-better public security.” The practical police work of most European countries goes against this mind set. In Hungary surveys have shown that increasing the numbers of police presence doesn’t have significant effect on public security in general on the long run.<sup>3</sup> As for the sense of public security studies haven’t been made yet. It is an empirical fact that overwhelming police presence doesn’t increase, but rather destroys the sense of public security of the population. It is not hard to argue that if a significant police force suddenly shows up in an area the population will rightly ask the reason for it. Most people will think that something happened, or going to happen that warrants this intense presence. But whatever it may be, it cannot possibly be something that would positively influence their lives, since the police appears only if something disturbs the peace and order of the community. Therefore it is unwarranted to order increased check-ups for a longer period of time mobilizing big forces in a certain area, unless there has been a concrete action to base this upon. It is especially reasonable to avoid causeless use of combat/raid/riot/tactical gear. The tactical gear will make policemen appear more aggressive and intimidate the citizens. If a citizen is afraid of policemen, how can we expect that the police presence would decrease the pre-existing sense of fear? Another negative effect of the tactical gear is that peaceful citizens will identify the wearer of the gear with those who appear in bigger groups handling riots. Therefore only a few policemen in tactical gear can instil a fear of rioting in the people.

The on call patrol in their car “dashing by” is unapproachable, untouchable. Cannot provide information, and cannot even be asked. The biggest mistake is that people living in the neighbourhood cannot provide information to them either. The patrol on foot or on bike even unwillingly has to move among people. Therefore he/she is approachable.

Besides the physical appearance of policemen the other factor influencing the sense of public security is their manner in conducting police business, which is a complicated issue. It is not only about how the policeman acts, how they communicate while doing so, but it is also important to study in what cases they need to take action. It is best to begin by looking at whether the action is warranted or not. We have to accept that policemen’s actions have to serve as remedy to the problems arising along the tension/fault lines of society. If the use of an otherwise perfectly legal policing tool does not bring closer to the solution of the

<sup>3</sup> Tihanyi Miklós: Közrendvédelmi bűnmegelőzés hazánkban. Magyar Rendészet, 2007/3-4.; Szabó Norbert: A közbiztonsági háló. TDK-dolgozat. Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem Rendészettudományi Kar, 2013

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problem that questions its legitimacy. And this in the sight of society is at least as big of a handicap as the hiatus of legality. This is why we might experience that society is not satisfied even with the most legally precisely executed police action. It is easy to be illustrated by something that many might have experienced. We often experience that the police set up speed check points where the place administratively a residential area, yet the driver moves in surroundings for miles that would make him believe that he is outside the residential area. Choosing the appropriate speed for the surroundings in this case is a motoring offence, and the policeman rightfully writes the ticket. Such an action is undoubtedly legal, but it is easy to see that it lacks any socially useful purpose. Since the goal of the speed checkpoints is to prevent accidents happening because of excessive speeding by the way of sanctioning the perpetrator. We can only accomplish that if we use these actions in areas where excessive speed actually has a realistically high risk of causing an accident. In every other case the truth is that our action did not serve the purpose of solidifying public security, but indeed this is the only real reason that gives police action legitimacy.

It is equally true about the approximately 2 million identity checks because we know that the reason behind this particular method of screening-searching work may only produce a success rate between 1-3%.<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that the APBs (All Points Bulletin – a specifically targeted warrant of caption) are way more effective than screening-searching, because while the latter may only produce the aforementioned results, the APB could be interpreted as the total actions taken in order to apprehend the suspect, which brings good results in most of the cases according to experience. Accordingly only the persons of interests, who may have valuable information concerning the location of the suspect, come under police scrutiny via APB. This means significantly less police action involving less people providing way greater results. This would mean the more efficient use of the police work force, no unwarranted actions to tarnish the social prestige of the police, finally the APB is a tool that provides a higher degree of success for policemen.

The execution of police action is undoubtedly a neuralgic point of service in public places. Most police actions – identity checks, vehicle checks, asking for information – take place in the environment of law abiding people. It is well known that police communication plays a crucial role in the perception of the police. This is specifically significant in regards to the sense of public security because – as we have mentioned – most Hungarian people expect the police to create public security. And if they are hurt by those they try to approach with trust their fear is multiplied due to disappointment.

Another problem relating to executing actions is that in the case of actions taken based on reports coming in from the population – there is no appropriate feedback to the one reporting. This may give the impression that they and their problem weren't taken and addressed seriously. This might develop the reflex in the citizens, that there is no point in

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<sup>4</sup> Tóth Balázs és szerzőtársai.: Szigorúan ellenőrzött iratok. A magyar igazoltatási gyakorlat hatékonyságáról és etnikai aspektusairól. Kutatási jelentés. Magyar Helsinki Bizottság, Budapest, 2008

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turning to the police. In order to avoid this we think it necessary to legally regulate, how they receive feedback as soon as possible – hopefully immediately – concerning the solution of the reported problem. Even if the particular problem is not solved perfectly the person reporting will have a positive feeling that they have been taken care of and therefore it is worth to turn to the police.

The effectiveness and necessity of video security systems/area surveillance systems (CCT Vs) is always under debate. If we accept that the camera is basically the technical version of a “policeman at their” it is easy to realize that its reason for use is unquestionable; we simply need to create appropriate rules with the right legal standards that satisfies the requirements of the law of state concerning their use: regarding the areas they can “see” and what they can record.

Based on experience the appropriate training of the individuals employed for area surveillance is yet unsolved, many times people sit in front of the monitors who don't even recognize public violations, even though their job should include the recognition of warning signs. In this regard it is welcome to have the Metropolitan Public Domain Maintenance officers (MPDMS) participate in area surveillance, because the civilian eye doesn't only recognize the enforceable violations. Contrary to this policemen only focus on social phenomena that surpass the threshold of criminal action, since these are the ones they can handle “effectively”. The civilian area surveillance will recognize such social phenomena that may not or just minimally be enforced yet may have a profound effect on the sense of public security of the population; such as a lonesome woman or child walking in a badly lit public area late evening or at night.

Therefore the question is which organization should be operating the area surveillance systems in what framework. Should local neighbourhood watch (or trainband) members actively participate in the work of area surveillance centres run by the Police or the Metropolitan Public Domain Maintenance Company? Since it would be on a volunteer basis it might be a financial advantage, on the other hand they would pay much more careful attention to their own living areas. But in this case training and preparation is unavoidable.

The active participation of the local neighbourhood watch might play a significant role in increasing the sense of public security if the appearance and the preparation of the neighbourhood watch enable them to fulfil quasi-police assignments.

The motivational factors that would inspire the members of society to volunteer sacrificing their own time for activities of public security are worth studying, thus improving the safety of their local neighbourhood. The department of Public Safety of The Law Enforcement Faculty of the National Public Service University (Nemzeti Köszolgálati Egyetem Rendészettudományi Kar közbiztonsági tanszék – NKE) have already been running studies in this field.<sup>5</sup> These studies so far have shown that most applicants to the neighbourhood watch are strongly motivated by the poorly perceived public security of their town. From

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<sup>5</sup>Vig Imre: A polgárőrség és a közrendvédelem Békés-megyében. Kézirat, 2013

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the perspective of the subjective sense of public security it is significant, since one of the sources of fear is the feeling of powerlessness. If somebody faces a problem that makes them feel powerless, they will feel defenceless and vulnerable. Once the feeling of powerlessness is solved, the feeling of fear will subside as well. As the individual feels more strongly that there is a solution to the problem and in fact one of them is in his/her hands the situation will seem much less hopeless. This will increase the sense of security. Therefore we feel it is necessary to widen the social basis of neighbourhood watch.

The citizens visit the local police station on duty if they want to make personal report, or when they want to press charges as victims of unlawful behaviour. Generally speaking this is the first time the two sides meet and make contact. Unfortunate experiences show that the personnel on duty do not conduct their job with the appropriate sense of empathy, many times the executed treatment does not show the smallest sense of cooperation. In the future, there will be no more local stations on duty therefore the commander on duty, or if they will have such the complaint registrar will do this. I am afraid this will increase the distance between the police and the society.

In our opinion, the attitude and the appropriate way of communication of the policemen directly dealing with the informer may significantly strengthen the subjective sense of public security. Although the unlawful action as the reason of the charges pressed cannot be prevented, it is unacceptable to have the victim wait for hours, then as obvious practitioners of certain privilege, they to begin to deal with their problem, or suggest for the victim to return the next workday, since it is "inappropriate" to bother them on the weekend or late in the evening. We are aware of concrete cases when the person on duty technically convinced the citizen not to press charges, explaining how insignificant his/her case was, how busy the police is, and they cannot even deal with such cases seriously.

We have to acknowledge that for the citizen who shows up at the station, there is no such thing as small case or big case. There is only one crime, the one that has endangered/hurt the security of his/her family or belongings. He/she is not concerned about the statistical tendencies or the police being overladen, but that the police will do all that it can to – as soon as possible – apprehend the culprit and help restore the loss. This is an understandable expectation and the proper police communication is obviously an important task even if the reported case in fact is a crime of smaller calibre. The citizen must be made feel that his/her report contains valuable information, and has to be reassured that there will be substantive step made in the case.

## LOCAL PROXI SERVICE

The Local Proxi Service's (further on: LPS) main role is – as it has been said many times – to keep in touch with the local population. This may be one of the most effective tools to increase the subjective sense of public security.

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Besides in its current form this kind of service cannot be called profile clean. To reach this goal it is unavoidable to make certain police services profile clean. There is no room for service open physical violence and the application of repressive punishments within one organizational unit. However when we emphasize the complexity of LPS service we admit that many times we use this way of service to reach goals that are contradictory to each other. Practical experiences show that – especially in big city areas – LPS often fulfils the duty of the public patrol by patrolling public areas. The patrol service inherently carries an emphasized characteristic of the application of reactive police action. The main job of patrol service is the police response to the violation of law against the citizens and it always leads to restriction of rights towards the violators.

Contrary to this LPS service should only fulfil a service role. This doesn't mean that once in a while it doesn't have to react as police to the violations, but it simply means that it doesn't have to seek the particular events that will warrant police action. On the other hand it has to be open to phenomena that does not necessary warrant police action, but may disturb the population. As example for illustration: it would be appropriate for the policeman to report to the utility company if there are so many faulty streetlights that may cause a feeling of apprehension in the public.

In order for the public's policeman to be realistically able to improve the subjective sense of public security they have to know the factors that irritate, threaten or intimidate. Policemen tend to interpret the threats of public security in the narrow sense of exclusively focusing on felonies or violations. The simple reason behind this is that these are the factors that can be easily numerically explained and are easily accountable. The characteristic of domestic police work is a statistical way of thinking it demands results not efficiency and even less effectiveness. Therefore the police primarily focuses on the violations that can be easily caught in action and can easily be proven, and because of this, though unintentionally, it ignores those – many time not even criminal – circumstances that are threats to the subjective sense of public security. Studies show that among the factors influencing subjective sense of public security felonies do not have a crucial role.<sup>6</sup> Although the study done by ELTE (an illustrious Hungarian university) in Budapest shows that according to the public there are not so many crimes, but in spite of that the fear of them is great. We have to note that we recognize, that the question concerning fear may suggest the response, since everybody is afraid of common crimes even those who have never came across any crime.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand a fifty person sample per district is hardly acceptable as representative.

The primary responsibility of the policeman of a certain zone is to find out the factors that sensitively influence the subjective sense of security of the population. There have been efforts made and once in a while we come across police practice that uses questionnaires to find out the subjective side of the sense of public security. The initiative is gladly

<sup>6</sup> Barabás Tünde – Irk Ferenc – Kovács Róbert (szerk.): i. m.

<sup>7</sup> <http://budapest.hu/Lapok/Közvélemény-kutatás-Budapest-közbiztonságáról.aspx>

welcomed, the idea seems good, but the execution is of low quality. Even the study that puts the subjective under the lens of a microscope must be objective. This requirement is automatically questioned when the local policeman makes sure the questionnaires are properly filled out, since he is the most interested party in a positive response. It would be better to leave these kinds of studies to science. One may come across such solutions in Budapest under the banner of ELTE.

Although it may be far from the scientific methods, but we must mention the local proxy in Budapest; who has used billboards to bring attention to his services to local population. On the billboard there is well readable mobile number where he can be reached. Thus the local population entrusted to him can and does inform him easily about issues that concern them, and he is ready to help with a solution. It is unfortunate that because of administrative reasons, he couldn't appear as LPS in the virtual community media, because it is well known that a significant portion of social communication happens here.

There are two apparent solutions to the conflict between the duties that warrant necessary police action and real problem solution. In the first case the formula for the necessary police action should be changed so that policemen might have a chance to use cooperation based solution instead of repressive action. The other alternative might be an institutional solution; in this case we need to separate the authoritative law enforcement that is meant to use repressive police action and the policeman involved in LPS who is more open to the problems of the community. We are not arguing for LPS officers not to take action, instead that their effectiveness might not be measured in their warranted activity, but the satisfaction of the local population.

#### THE LATEST REFLECTION OF THE HUNGARIAN POLICE

The ORFK (National Police Headquarters) has issued an action plan to improve the subjective sense of security of the population – as in a town or area – by focusing on prevention first of all. In this action plan it has been defined that every county police HQ in their area of influence in accordance with the opinion of the local township public security forums and the measured risk assessments of public security has to classify the settlements and their areas (from now on simply: settlements). The leaders of the HQs have to classify the settlements as following: “especially endangered” “endangered” or “not considered as dangerous” categories based on the following: criminal data, tendencies, the population's sense of public security, the endangerment of the locals, the number of non-criminal violations, the number of conflict situations in previous time periods, other relevant circumstantial factors, number of enlisted policemen. IN the classification process the opinion of the mayor of the settlement or the opinion of the local township public security forums may not be ignored. The classification should happen with their cooperation and should be revised monthly.

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Based on the action plan, the police service should be organized that the especially endangered areas daily the endangered areas at least three times per week and the areas not considered as dangerous would be weekly monitored by the police.

The emphasis first of all should be on the monitoring of the settlements starting from the periphery to the interior with the intention of preventing criminal action and violations that irritate the public most and protecting the public peace. We have to make sure that the mayor of the settlement, or his/her proxy receives appropriate feedback of the monitoring. This will further strengthen the role of the local government in creating the local public security.

If possible, the members of the local associate authorities – local government police organizations, social organizations, neighbourhood watch should be involved in the execution of the monitoring as well.

## SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

Interestingly enough, the sense of public security of the citizens may decline in spite of the improving, or even drastically improving criminal statistics. The improvement of the sense of public security is a complex assignment, and the police is only one factor in this. Its job of course is unquestionable, but the challenge of the ages might require a different approach than the police reactions in the classic sense of the word. In order to be effective, the following suggestions can be made:

Limit the police monitoring to cases that warrant it both in the areas of policing traffic and guarding public peace.

Increase the number of patrols on foot.

Limit the use of combat/raid gear only to the warranted situations.

Limit the obligation of cogent measures, which limit the range of executable actions exclusively, to the warranted cases; and allowing the policeman – if he/she deems it more effective - to take another course of action in order to solve the issue.

To work out the legal framework and the professional protocol of providing feedback to the complainer/reporting citizen regarding the reported issue. A similar action might be suggested to the criminal service, since the citizens opinion is easily influenced by such simple things as: the investigator personally communicates with the victim, personally notifying the victim and reassuring him/her that the police takes every necessary action in their case.

We have to accept, that a significant amount of community life happens in virtual space. Therefore we have to provide opportunities for the community policeman to keep in touch with the community of his/her settlement/area through social media.

Improvement of how the policemen and the police communicate.

Create a clean profile for LPS so that they would really be able to fulfil the needs of the local community, becoming real community policemen.

Expansion of the social base of the neighbourhood watch and the creation of environment of effective cooperation.

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