

Police Café Pécs – innovative consultation of police and civilians about security

In the globalizing world nowadays concurrently with the intensification of transnational safety risks and threats, social demand towards safer and more liveable communities has been grown significantly.

Protection of the safe and liveable community is common social responsibility. The permanent activity of law enforcement authorities has a crucial role in protection of safety, which however mustn't dispense with the helpful support of non-governmental organisations and citizens.

It has been generally believed since decades in Hungary that safekeeping over (public) security is primarily, if not exclusively, liability of police. This approach is surely very convenient for the civilian society; moreover it shifts remarkable responsibility to the police. And no matter how a police of a country endeavours, it is unable up to its tasks alone. People are still hope preferably effective and immediate solutions by the policemen, by the police to their odds and ends.

World Café

With this community development method the first step can be taken on the way towards the liveable, safer community. We heard about this method first in 2008, one of our colleagues brought its news from Belgium, where Belgian Police has used it named Police Café. Anyone can be informed about the technique by the royalty free webpage „The World Café Community”¹.

We ourselves thought about in June 2013 - during the conference of the Police Science titled: „*The actual challenges of the variable law enforcement*” - that it would be worth to try the method of the Café in Hungary, namely in Pécs.

The reason of why we have tried the method in Pécs is the following criminal case. A young woman, psychologist of the police disappeared on the way home from a pub in Pécs in July 2012. Considerable manpower was deployed by Police to search for her. Her dead body was found by children playing three days after in a park not far away from her apartment. Special attention has been paid by the media and intensified social expectations has been met the investigation. In the next day of the finding police identified the perpetrator by DNA remnants and had apprehended him 3 days later.

After efficient investigation and watchfully, thoroughly organized apprehension, police proceedings have been continuously surrounded mistrust, unbelief, causing hysteria by the citizens questioning the professionalism and credibility of the investigation, destroying the prestige of police.

Police of the city has been confronted such a problem, which had to be faced. During the conference had been organized one year after the sad case our aim was to analyse the emerging of the problem, its reasons and we have already that time started thinking about solution too. We introduced shortly the method of World Café, and we defined a specific recommendation on how to start resolving a problem situation of Pécs. Hence decision making procedures are very slow; almost one year had to be passed with making our ideas true in spring of 2014, that we might start the training which enabled us to organize the Police Café Pécs.

¹ <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/>

Police Café Pécs

Primary aim of the initiative - which is standalone so far in the Hungarian Police - is the most comprehensive possible involvement of civilians in creation and maintaining of safety. We would like to make the view generally believed that security; creation and operation of more liveable communities are not only police tasks. Police messages (finally): it cannot be done alone; it is just one, of course highly important player in this cooperation. Police said: - Come dear people of Pécs, in the first turn those representatives of state- and non-governmental organisations, agencies who undertook tasks and responsibilities first together with police, so that all of us would be able to own a safer and more liveable Pécs!

In particular, this method is great because of the local collective wisdom and cooperation can be activated to detect, analyse problems. The problem needs to be dealt with by all means, it cannot be postponed, but from outside or from above it cannot be solved. Nobody is happy when someone pretends to know the perfect solution. The point is that there is no single recipe that anybody could prescribe. The method of the Café professes, proclaims and proves: the solutions only can be created on the spot together. Nevertheless, it needs to be set down to talk about our common things, problems. Specifically the initiative is in a good hand at the police, because whether we accept it or not: in Hungary, in the minds of civilians, police is still the most important key player of creation and guarding of safety. The Café is superb tool for the expression of the initiative skills, so that the police not only the follower of the events, but the manager of security enhancement processes.

We think that life and security which defines it dominantly in Pécs hasn't been worse as it was before. Crime rates also proved this: in the city, in the recent period in the city have been relevantly decreased both the crimes became known and the number of crimes committed in public places, and also the detection indicators showed positive trends. So that the locals should feel this too, it's necessary and worth to work on. But only together - civilians with the police and with the press.

Preparation to the Police Café – Training of the policemen

Target group of the training was the staff of leaders and local police officers responsible for a district at local police stations of Police Office of Pécs, altogether fifteen people. In the whole day-long training held on 12th of May in 2014, besides them the Chief of County Police Headquarters, Head of the Police Office, Heads of the Crime Prevention Divisions of the County Police Headquarters and of the Police Office, the county police's spokesman and the press officers participated too.

Direct aim of the training was the preparation of the police officers to transact Police Cafés carried out between 2nd and 5th of June 2014 in four districts of Pécs.

Content of the training can be divided into two parts. In the first part of the day professionals participating in the project and their leaders could be seated to a table successfully, and existing expectations and reservations could be mapped in the target group with testing the problem resolving method to be learnt during the training. The local high ranking leaders and project host were also active participants of this procedure, who could thus gain a view about resources of the staff, and could make their direct contributions: to express their commitment to the project as leaders, their support and their responsibilities towards the project implementers. Hereby they could motivate colleagues to qualitative implementation of the program. We are concerned that it could be one of the very essential guarantees of the successful implementation of the program. In the second half of the day, the potential of the participants' professional experiences, local knowledge, creative ideas,

personal skills dredging and bringing into play in team work we outlined firmly the Cafés content and framework.

Topics processed in the training, serving essential added values for the organization of forums were the following: possible forum locations by districts and their choosing aspects; scope of people to be invited to the forums; questions to be raised and discussed to the forums, starting points and milestones of problems; definition of skills and expected requirements of the ideal police table-host, necessary methodology for him, minimum conditions necessary and asset demand at the scene of forums. Special “protocols” have been made about all these, which were presentations, introduced results of the working groups, written and drawn on flipchart paper.

Benefit of the training is, that police officers on the one hand could try participants’ roles as their own experiences in similar situation to the Café, could live the feeling and dynamic atmosphere of the unconventional problem resolving conversations. It could clear many misunderstandings and disapprovals in them. On the other hand they could practice themselves in the role of the table-host, and received methodological assistance to make the table-host presentation. At the end of the training they summarized the knowledge gained, they had a chance to tell their impressions, feelings by short reflexions in connection with the project, with the preparatory training, and the handbook containing the description of methodology was handed over to them.

During the training’s brainstorming *important recommendations* have been made, which were used by the project leaders to ensure the successful implementation. These were the following:

- After the training, and even before the press-public and before implementation of the Cafés, police officers involved in the project had met their leaders again for an informal conversation. Here they could tell their impressions gained in the training, could ask their questions. The one and a half hours dedicated to this, meant motivating force for them, hence it also indicated informally that: they weren’t left alone in the new situation, their opinion, their satisfaction was important, and their leaders were open-minded to their concerns as well. At this meeting, scope of the participants to be invited to Cafés to be held in the districts of the city, text of the invitations to be sent out and venues of events were being finalized. This meant a lot of useful and practical help in the organization activity, and made colleagues even more committed to it.
- We suggested evaluation after the Cafés with the colleagues involved into the project, asking for their feedback, listening to their experiences and opinions, and to collect additional suggestions and ideas to continue.
- It has been a crucial issue among media aspects to name the project aptly. The Police Café Pécs proposal emerged during the training, which has remained consistently as the name of the project and will remain in use too.

Implementation of the Police Café

Budget of the implementation of the Café were covered by Baranya County Police Headquarters from one part of the 3.5 million Hungarian Forints funding awarded on a tender announced by the National Crime Prevention Council in 2014. Title of the project: *For the safer Pécs*, and one of the pillars of it was the preparatory training of the community policemen and the implementation of the series of events Police Café Pécs.

According to the methodology of the Café, Police has invited professionals who are somehow responsible for the public security of the four districts of the city (16-16 persons) for an unconventional and innovative conversation. Occasionally a total of three-four hours of togetherness operated in accordance with the World Café principles, in comfortable

environment, encouraging the participants to activity, verifying the objective of the meeting clearly and precisely, focusing on the point till the last with the support and management of the table-hosts, sharing information and experiences with each other, also revealing the relationships and contradictions, taking visible and summarizing the results to all participants.

The Cafés were held between 2nd and 5th of June, in 2014 at four comfortable venues of Pécs. First day the modern Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, second day the Gandhi Secondary Grammar School and Dormitory, third day the Apáczai Csere János Education Center, fourth day the Elementary School in Bánki Donát Street have given place for the Police Café, which was organized by Baranya County Police Headquarters and by Police Office of Pécs. In four zones of Pécs: in “Belváros”, in „Gyárváros”, in „Kertváros” and in „Uránváros” police officers working there and invited representatives of state- and non-governmental organisations responsible for the security (about fifty people during four days), sat down with the intention of mapping the public security situation linked to the respective fields, and the most urgent problems.

The table-hosts of the Police Café were well trained, experienced, and very open-minded, communicative local police officers, whose role was to moderate conversations of the colourful, table-companions consisting of invitees representing different professions and organisations, to summarize, structure what has been said, than to make and give creative presentations on the topics processed.

The certain presentations have been summarized by Café moderators. Thus, results of consultation have become apparent and perspicuous, and the presentations were accompanied by huge interest, because work of all of us was behind it. Everything what has been told, can serve tangibly as a protocol, that the problem-maps including in them can either be used by heads of the police stations of the specific part of the city, as starting point of their concrete local public security strategy. The sketches drawn to the flipcharts at the end of the Café police officers also brought with them.

Direct aim of the Café is therefore interactive, creative police-civilian discussion in four districts of Pécs between police officers working there and representatives of state- and non-governmental organisations responsible for the security with the intention of mapping the public security situation linked to the respective fields, and the most urgent problems, more accurate and more detailed, from more point of view.

Indirect aim of the Café is the introduction of this innovative consultative methodology and dissemination among the widest possible audience. Thereby urging that those who want to do something to make Pécs more liveable and safer, and responsible organizations shall find each other and not only problems regarding public security but also relationship between them shall be accurately analysed. Only when exploring the reasons of problems will be completed, it will just be possible to identify clearly, and who should be in charge of the planning of management of issue, who should be in charge of the responsible decision making, respectively performance of problem-resolving.

Direct benefit of the Café is that - based on the information gathered in this way - local law enforcement organisation shall be able to plan and organize necessary measures and interventions in a more targeted way. *Indirect benefit of Café* as it is hoped, that those - who have been addressed this way - better and more active as real partners, recognizing their own role and responsibility, would be involved into the exploration, analyses of local problems and through this, by and by involved into resolving them too.

It should be underlined that the *sustainability of the project* can be guaranteed only if the learning and trying of the method won't remain a single occasion, but it will be constantly brushed up and even improved. Its advantage is that it can be configured flexibly to the actual environment, to the actors and issues, problems to be processed. If we practise the invitees to such pleasant and moreover effective method of discussions, than cooperation can become

much smoother, don't evolve – or if they do – certain misunderstandings, conflicts or contradictions can be clarified easier. In time even supposed counter-interests, stereotypes, prejudices, pointing at each other, shifting responsibility will also be reduced. As a result of all these, dialogue will be improved; situation awareness, undertaking problems, making decisions and problem resolving will become more efficient. In brief, commitment of the community towards their own safety, life and fate can be developed.

Results and initial difficulties

We must admit that during the test phase besides the successes necessarily a lot of initial difficulties have been emerged. These all were reviewed in a two and a half hours-long common assessment meeting took place in the Police Office of Pécs on 6th of June in 2014. Evaluation is essential element of every project; hence it makes achievements clearly visible through specific experiences and helps focusing on potential problems, essential points that need to be changed.

It is important to underline, that besides police table-hosts of the Café, Chief of County Police Headquarters, Head of the Police Office, Head of the Crime Prevention Division of the County Police Headquarters as project host, Head of Secretary of the County Police Headquarters as police moderator of the Café, civilian moderator of the Café – who is also trainer of the preparatory trainings - and heads of the police stations of four districts of Pécs participated as well.

Definite results of the Café includes, that

- innovative character of the method have attracted interest of invitees, thereby it has given opportunity to discuss specific questions and to reveal problems effectively;
- the event has given great help to the civilians to clarify the role of the police. Thoroughly and more trustworthy it could present the role and commitment of the police in creation and in preservation of local public safety;
- police could obtain a lot of information which otherwise couldn't be gained;
- during the informal but moderated discussions personal acquaintances, relationships have been formed and strengthened, which helped to restore and enhance the trust between police and civilians;
- role of the table-host has enabled development of personal communication skills of the policemen; they could be able to use it in their everyday work as well. Efforts invested into the training will be useful in long-term too.

It should be noted that the project wouldn't have been possible if the county police headquarters and the police office leaders aren't totally stand up for the initiative. From the beginning to the closure of the project they not only formally, but informally helped the policemen.

We disclose *initial difficulties* in bullet points too, in order to make it possible to learn from them. These were the following:

- It is necessary to select invitees more carefully (not to leave out someone).
- It is necessary already in the invitation letter to clarify the reason of the invitation clearly.
- Even more necessary to make sure that invitees will take part. It could be facilitated partly with personal contacting, partly with gradual unfolding of the method.
- It is necessary to have more time between the preparatory training and the implementation, because it had to be organized in a hurry during three weeks this time because the time

available for three weeks. For the professional preparation of the events several weeks have to be paid.

- It requires more careful choice to find the time of the Café. In particular: not to hold such densely in consecutive days, no to hold in the beginning of the month, it is worth to hold in the middle day of the week in the morning etc.
- It is recommended to increase duration of the Café with one hour, so it should be planned to 4 hours instead of three, otherwise we're running out of time. Experience has shown that for each table to discuss certain issues 30-30 minutes are needed.
- The recommended topics require thorough preparation. Preferably tailored problems in a specific topic should be shared; there should be no overlaps between the different topics. Also, experience has shown that an optimum number of problems to be processed in the Café are three.
- It should be endeavoured to compile table companies more consciously. It can be achieved by selecting the invitees in a more targeted way.
- Attention have to be paid to further improvement of the information flow too, sharing documents, background materials on a common electronic platform would be helpful in it.
- Thank you letters and meeting-minutes should be sent after the Cafés to the participants, latter as a courtesy for those also who didn't come.
- Essential element is the informal, sincere evaluation of the project.
- Coffee should be also an important element of the Café besides mineral water and scone, which was failed in our case, but we recommend for everyone that it doesn't worth to save money on it.
- It is also necessary to specify further the venue selection. Selected venue should be discreetly elegant, not too ostentatious, not too busy and crowded, quite large, but not too big, should be bright, clean, tidy, and easy to approach.
- To practice the hospitality is also worth to pay attention (arrival, guest reception, introduction, departure, and greeting). The event shouldn't be finished suddenly, shouldn't we leave speedily with the banners, and shouldn't start packing until there are the guests. If they enjoyed themselves and also they have time they still glad to stay for a relaxed and informal chat with the policemen. It is worth to crucify a whole working day for carrying out the program.

Perspectives and recommendations

Methodology of the Café has provided a number of further additional opportunities for use within the work in the police organization. The method could be an excellent tool to reveal colleagues' ideas and suggestions; it facilitates the cooperation, common thinking, and clear situation analyses. Last but not least it may help to reduce distances between each hierarchy level.

Teaching and disseminating the method can be emerged to other police colleagues (not just in Pécs, but on the county or national level, for example holding demonstrations of Police Cafés).

Direct benefit of the Café is that - based on the problems mapped with the civilians – police stations of the respective city districts could create even specific strategies and action plans from them as soon as possible in order to problem resolving. If it turned out that there's no police competence of the individual case or issue, than they could address those affected with contacting or with a request.

Dissemination of the method of the Café among civilians can be also an aim. Over the stimulating effect of the acquaintances as a result of personal meetings, the method itself has a kind of stimulus power, which we hope, won't stop at the rehearsal level but will be liked by

many people and will be used more often. Whether Cafés of all kind will be held, where the police will be "only" one among the invited partners, meaning that goes back as a guest to other Cafés organized to unfold and solve other public problems facing the city.

Finally, we wish all the communities of actually intending to deal with their own problems and which is active and committed to responsibility for their own safety, feel free to go for it; they should also try the method presented by us. Impose it their own image, fit the Police Café up to their liking, and report on the results!

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