

# The Police Café

## An efficient method for improving the dialogues between the police and the community

**Katalin Molnár**  
**Erna Uricska**

National University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary<sup>1</sup>



### Abstract

Nowadays there is an urgent social demand for safer and more liveable communities because of the intensification of national safety problems, international, and transnational threats.

In this article an initiative method will be introduced that was first used by the Belgian Police. The method is called *the Police Café*, after the original method which was called *the World Café*, a structured conversational process. The primary aim of the initiative, that is unique within the Hungarian Police, is to reach the most intensive involvement of the members of the Police and civilians in order to restore and maintain safety.

According to the methodology of *the Café*, the police invite professionals who are somehow responsible for the public safety of the given precinct of a city representing different professions or organisations to carry out an unconventional and innovative conversation.

The protection of safer and liveable communities is our common social responsibility and with this innovative method, the first step can be taken.

**Keywords:** the Police Café, liveable communities, partnership between the police and the community

### The origin of the method

The Police Café is based on the method called the World Café that was invented for community development purposes by Juanita Brown, a leader of an American organisation, 21 years ago (Brown, 2002; Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

At the World Café, the participants of a special area are selected deliberately and they are expected to activate their common thinking by exploiting their collective wisdom through open communication among

the partners. In this way, they should communicate efficiently. The purpose of the meetings is to identify, define, name and explore the problems of the area and analyse their causes. Then the participants start to find the solutions, while making precise and serious personal common commitments and taking responsibility. Or more precisely: they try to find the most appropriate solution there and then.

The Police Café also tries to facilitate this creative process, with the difference that the aim here is to evoke cooperation through dialogue among the members of the police and the community, in order to improve local safety. Ideally, the method is preventive in nature

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding authors emails: molnar.katalin@uni-nke.hu, uricska.erna@uni-nke.hu.

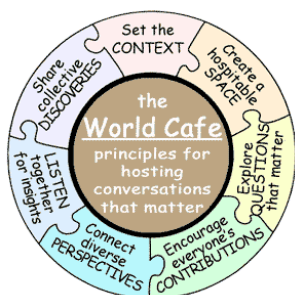
but it can be applied as brilliantly as a problem solving method, if a specific security deficit occurs.

The meeting has to be carried out as it is laid down in the original methodological principles; only in this way

can it be called a *Café*. The methodology of the Police Café is based on the serious protocol of the World Café, but three special principles were added. Table 1 illustrates these principles.

**Table 1** The Principles of the World Café and the Police Café

| The seven principles of the World Café | The 7 + 3 principles of the Police Café                            |
|--|--|
| Set the context.                       | Set the context.   |
| Create hospitable space.               | Create hospitable space.   |
| Explore questions that matter.         | Explore questions that matter.                                     |
| Encourage everyone’s contributions.    | Encourage everyone’s contributions.                                |
| Connect diverse perspectives.          | Connect diverse perspectives.                                      |
| Listen together for insights.          | Listen together for insights.                                      |
| Share collective discoveries.          | Share collective discoveries.                                      |
|  | The organisation of a Police Café is not compulsory.               |
|  | Give the freedom of the selection of the themes to the organisers. |
|  | Do not urge anything. Let the things go in their own speed.        |



At the same time, the method is relatively cheap. There are some expenses depending on the local needs: besides the establishment of the hosting space in harmonisation with the principles and the expenses of minimal catering (coffee, mineral water and some snacks), it is necessary to spend on the training of the table hosts and to pay the honorarium of the moderator; but these expenses can be regarded as an investment for the whole community in the long run.

**How does the Police Café operate?**

This Café is called the Police Café because the table hosts are police officers. The participants sit around smaller tables of 6 or 8 and the table hosts who are

actually police officers go from table to table with their own special topic and lead the conversations around the tables within a certain time frame. All of the topics represented by a police officer must be addressed by all of the members at the tables. Sometimes the participants may argue and try to chase each other. They argue, ask and answer. They say, show and draw. Finally, the table hosts summarise and compare the comments and the moderator closes the forum.

If it is a Police Café, surely there must be a topic in connection with the police: legislation, legal compliance, misdemeanours or offences? Not really. What is more, sometimes there are not any words about these topics. The main topic is safety. We talk about how to feel good where we live, work, go out and travel. We also

talk about when our living places, streets, workplaces and schools are liveable or when they are not. The police officers, who lead the conversations also live, work, go out and travel with us and they know a lot about safety. But they do not and cannot maintain it without us; but instead help us to create and maintain it. So, this is the reason why we have to talk to each other. And these conversations are supplied by the Police Café.

## The beginnings of the Police Café in Hungary

In 2007 a colleague, a well-known figure of Law Enforcement science in Hungary, brought the news of the Police Café to Hungary from Belgium, where the Belgian Police had applied the method to similar purposes. We immediately fell in love with the method. As a result, in 2008, when the master training of the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the National University of Public Service was introduced, we presented the method to the students; but they did not really understand it. We offered the method to others as well - but we were not able to try it out anywhere.

Unfortunately, an unexpected chance arrived in 2014. After a brutal murder of a police psychologist in Pécs, there was an opportunity to come up with an innovative method in order to strengthen local safety (Gaál & Molnár, 2013). We organized four meetings in four precincts of Pécs, just to start the history of the Hungarian version of the Police Café (Gaál & Molnár, 2015) - and at that time we just hoped that it could be a success story.

Since then, Pécs had the first-mover advantage: on 12 May 2015 - a year after the first event - we organised a one-day Police Café training, where the police officers of the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Budapest could learn the method from their colleagues from Pécs within the framework of the neighbourhood police program. They were the first members, who could organise a thematic Police Café on 9 November 2016 as they had the opportunity to choose a special topic connected to safety, out of the general questions. In 2017 we also tested the method in a Consultation Forum of Public Safety in two districts of Bóly and Sásd to the great satisfaction of the local communities.

## Training and supervision for police officers

From the beginning we have considered it a very important element of guaranteeing a good outcome to insist on a prior training before organising a Police Café. It was a great achievement when we succeeded in creating its organisational framework.

The National Crime Prevention Council accredited an 8-hour long, 8-credit training course called *The Police Café – methodological and communicational training course for police officers* in the training system of the Public Procurement Authority in Hungary in the spring of 2016. The registration number of the training is 3/M/2016/5468.

The training lasts a day and it is the best when there are 12-25 persons. Its speciality is that it is an self-experience based learning, so the participants can learn the method while practising it as well. They learn and try everything that is necessary to organise a successful Police Café. Its main advantage is that the trainer can go to the educational place and the participants are able to work out the details focusing on the local specialties and human resources together with the help of the trainer, since the professional content cannot be prescribed.

The year 2017 brought a breakthrough, as we realised that the Police Café series can be arranged in a larger area as well. It requires not only a careful preparation but also an aftercare process. Therefore, we started to organise supervision meetings for the organisers and the contractors of the program by following the classical rules, but also applying the Café methodology as well. Up to now (2018), there were two such events: one of them in Kiskunhalas on 5 July, 2017 and the other in Budapest on 19 July, 2017.

## The first significant breakthrough – a webpage was born

A good method is worthless, if it remains unknown - and that is why some marketing was required. On 24 August 2017 a brilliant opportunity appeared that would have been a pity to miss: the methodology of the Police Café could be shown at the inauguration of the National University of Public Service in a 20-minute presentation. At the same time, it went public, as we

had been working with professional marketing experts on the webpage of the Police Café. Finally, we had to wait 5 more weeks for its start.

It was a great pleasure that 10 percent of the attendees had heard about the method earlier from different sources: from Facebook, from a police superintendent, who had been a host in several Cafés, civilian patrols and colleagues. Some of them had already tried the method based on their personal experience from a 'real' Police Café, or acquired through learning, from home or abroad.

After a three-month preparation, on 2 October 2017 the webpage called [www.policecafe.hu](http://www.policecafe.hu) went online. We try to do our best to reach more and more people with the news of this initiation. Thanks to the person who initially brought the method to Hungary ten years ago and those who helped to make the dream come true!

Finally, the method could have went out to a wider audience. It is not a secret intent of the webpage that those people who are interested in the method, can find all of the continuously updated information that could be useful, valuable and interesting for them easily, in a structured way and in one place.

The origin of the method, the methodological description and the details of the application for the training are the most important sections. But if you glimpsed into the atmosphere of the Police Cafés, you might search in the photo gallery in each location as well. You can find where and when we organised Police Cafés and our presence in the media can also be traced.

The target audience of the webpage can be divided into three groups: police officers, civilians and their communities. Additionally, we would like to raise the awareness of the institutions too. This Police Café is for all of us, together who are more and more often confronted with the safety challenges of the modern world in our everyday lives. The Police Café explores the answers for these questions and if we follow the protocol, we will have a good chance of finding the answers as well.

We encourage communities to initiate and support the opening of the Police Cafés, help the organising process and once there has been a Police Café for a while, please visit it as often as it is possible. In the meantime, please enter the hall of a Police Café and visit the webpage.

## The history of the Police Café in Hungary in numbers

The webpage is improving continuously, the forthcoming Police Cafés can be seen, the previous cafés are documented with professional experience reports and they are illustrated with pictures. For result-oriented organisations such as the Police, data can tell a lot, especially when this data is compared to other data. Let's have a look at the history of the Hungarian Police Café in numbers.

In 2014, when the initiation was introduced in Hungary we organised four meetings in one Hungarian city, Pécs.

In the following year there were only two cafés: one of them was in Pécs again and the other one was held in Budapest, the capital.

In 2016 there were nine Police Cafés in nine cities, which is a promising increasing tendency.

But the year of 2017 was even more significant as there were 21 Police Cafés in 12 cities. This can be called a real breakthrough, not only in the arrangement of Police Cafés but in the methodological training of police officers as well. As 40 police officers participated in the 8- hour long training on three occasions in 2016, there were four training occasions and 80 police officers were able to participate in the training in 2017.

If we play with the numbers, let's have a look at the number of the civil participants of the 21 Police Cafés in 2017. We will get this number if we take 18 participants per an occasion. There were 14-24 people around 2 or 4 tables. So, the proper number is 378, because there were 21 Police Cafés. If we deduct the number of those persons who came to several cafés, the number of the participants is still above 300 throughout the country, beside the organisers, hosts, table-hosts and naturally, the moderator. Because of their significant roles in the future, we can state that these persons can be counted as 150 people again. So, there are more than 500 people who were concerned within a year. And this is a number that we may be proud of.

But this is enough about the quantitative measures that can be expressed in numbers. This is not important or relevant for the organisers, hosts and guests but rather they can become parts of qualitative conversations who can sit around a table with a cup of coffee and they can exchange ideas, thoughts and opinions – namely words- about the safety of their surroundings.

It is a great honour for us that through our conference presentation and article, the Hungarian Police Café was able to appear on the colourful methodological map of the European law enforcement.

### Impact assessments – for now, at an early stage

It was evident, from the amount of positive feedback supplied to the team, that the project had widespread support. It was very important because a person can believe in the importance of a case but only the feedbacks are able to express the real value of something. In order to express these opinions -based on their own experience about the Police Café - it was necessary to create its proper forums. On the one hand, there is a chance on the webpage for writing comments to the posts. On the other hand, in January 2018 a separate block was created under the title 'Police Café Extra' where there is a chance to leave longer, professional comments.

Evidently, we also try to collect objective feedback about the individual opinions. An analysing summary is being prepared after completing a questionnaire about the 8-part Police Café series in Budapest and

the results will be presented, although it is impossible to present them at the moment because of its incompleteness. Within the police officers participating in the project, the aftermath of the same series will be examined as well. It is extremely important to be aware of their opinions and thoughts as well.

### To be continued... more Police Cafés

After the description of the method, it is obvious that we would like to bring the method to a wider audience faster but we do not want to be seen as unsatisfied. However, it is necessary to mention the difficulties that we are facing.

One of the most important difficulties in Hungary is the attitude. In spite of the fact that one and a half decade had passed after the first attempts (Cserép & Molnár 2005), it has not become a kind of philosophy - which should have made his way into the entire system of

law enforcement: that law enforcement should focus on the communities and their local problems.

In contrast to many excellent projects in this scientific area, the Police Café is not a periodic program but it is such a method with which law enforcement professionals can directly experience its significant role in creating and maintain safety of the community with learning and testing the method. Moreover: they realise that this role can be more serious that they think and sometimes it is even more important for the law enforcement organisations. The regular dialogues that started and were maintained by such communication methods about the local safety can make the partners' common responsibility continuous, which is the key asset to safety.

When the question arose that how we could have a Police Café, it should be noted that organising a Café requires solid professional expertise. One of the purposes of the webpage was that this expertise could be reached. The realisation of the previous trainings and Police Cafés was supported by the National Crime Prevention Council in the form of tenders in Hungary. It is worthwhile looking for the opportunity from the same source but the training and the arrangements can be financed from other sources as well (e.g. municipal, foundation, civil organisation).

With this, we highlighted the other most difficult circumstance, namely the lack of the financial sources. Common thinking presupposes the learning and development demands of the communities for which we have to spend time, energy and money - lots of them. It is not an immediate action, but a long-term investment. Those who learn the method of the Police Café and feel its power in shaping the safety within the community by its application, they believe in it. And not too soon, but in the end, they realise that it is worth investing into the development of knowledge and skills.

The details- the specific topics, the invited guests, the scenes- always depend on the specifics of the local community, they require thorough reflection, careful planning and personal consultations.

## Reflections and the relevance of the method

When the authors of the article saw the central topic of the CEPOL conference called *'Innovations in law enforcement – Implications for practice, education and civil society'* in July 2017, both of them thought that the focus of the conference was absolutely for them. The aims and the methodology of the Police Café fitted perfectly into the profile of the conference.

Since the conference it has been frequently asked whether the Police Café has had measurable effects in those communities where it had been tried out and applied. Despite the fact that preventive programs do not have easily measurable results according to their nature we will be able to present the opinion of the participants of the Cafés.

A longer, empirical questionnaire study will be published in autumn 2018 and another study of interviews in spring 2019. It can be said that the reception was positive from both sides of the police and the citizens. Not only the law enforcement, but the community shaping results of the dialogues can be demonstrated as well.

We are convinced that the police do have a serious corporate social responsibility (CSR) with the support of creating and maintaining security as a professional service in a modern democratic state. If it is carried out in a partnership through dialogue with the members of the local community, then it is a clear indication that they take this responsibility seriously. Therefore, the Police Café can be a possible and a prominent tool in the procedure of CSR.

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