Motivation and Attitudes Behind the Career Choices of Hungarian Student Police Officers in Light of Policing Models

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Abstract

Aim: The article examines the motivation and difference between police attitudes. This is worth examining what policing models exist, what police staff and professional attitudes fit into them, and what career choice attitudes are associated with them.

Methods: In the research survey was used. The individuals in the sample were all accepted into higher education and undertook the basic training of full-time police officer training.

Findings: The Author enlisted eight law enforcement models, which were divided into four clusters. The examined framework can be characterized by different goals and attitudes and it was found that we cannot talk about pure attitudes. The plurality of attitudes may vary from one branch of service to another, which may lead to mixed attitudes among respondents. A significant part of the students who start their law enforcement training did not see a pattern in terms of police careers, and their motivations and attitudes. A preconceived police attitude can be observed, because when candidates enter the police organization and start practical work, the organizational culture inherits the accepted police attitude and this is when their 'professional blindness' becomes decisive.

Value: The study highlights the attitudes of police officer students at the beginning of their university education. The Author considered it important to find out in which patterns students entering training can identify with the values and views suggested by different law enforcement models. For this, the Author enlisted the help of eight law enforcement models. The different attitude contributes to society's acceptance that the functioning of law enforcement agencies is understandable and provides feelings of security.

Keywords: police students, policing models, attitudes, motivation

Introduction

Today, conscious career choices are not uncommon among young people. With the expansion of education, Hungarian high school graduates flow en masse into higher education institutions. This has a particular effect on the law enforcement education system. The prospective students take part in a specific recruitment procedure to become police officer candidates and the training then usually lasts three to four years. The admission procedure (Dsupin, 2021) is complex, as the central entry process is complemented with a psychological and physical assessment as well as a career orientation interview, and these together form the final admission result (Farkas & Malkócs, 2022). The development of personality and professional competence in accordance with the career requirements take place continuously during the training (Malét-Szabó & Takács-Fehér, 2021). Getting to know the social background and career choice motivations of prospective police officers is especially important for the institution providing the training (Baráth, 2022; Erdős, Magasvári & Szabó, 2020; Magasvári & Szakács, 2021). All this process ensures for the training institution that after the admission procedure, students not only acquire theoretical knowledge, but also their attitude is formed.

The institution offering the training should be *'aware of the motivations, attitudes and values of its students in order to increase the efficiency of the training'* (Bjorgo, 2017). Rapid changes in the information society make it all the more necessary for the police officer training to meet professional expectations under conditions that provide future police officers with commitment and professionalism in the labour market, specifically in the law enforcement sector. The values developed during the training determine the attitudes according to which the police officer will perform his/her duties later.

It is assumed that a significant proportion of police officer students, just like other higher education students, have different attitudes towards their future profession. We consider professionalism that determines quality of work as a basic value among Hungarian police officer students, and this deserves attention during police officer training.

The aim of the Hungarian longitudinal survey of the international RECPOL (Recruitment, Education and Careers in the Police) research presented in this study is to reveal the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of students entering the training programme about their chosen career and to monitor the impact of

training on students' personality, values and career orientation (Bjørgo & Damen, 2020; Inzunza & Wikström, 2020; Bäck, Vallès & Padyab, 2017; Bäck, 2020).

The pillars of our own research are based on the above mentioned RECPOL research, but we use knowledge derived from law enforcement models that emphasize the different values and goals of a career in law enforcement. We examine how values and motivations of Hungarian police officer students are separated from each other, how the police officer attitude develops and what elements it consists of. We assume that young individuals coming from different family backgrounds bring different values when choosing a career, and this in turn reveals which law enforcement model explains these values. In the following sections the conditions for the development of the models and their inherent values are presented.

Policing models and attitudes

In order to differentiate between police attitudes (Baráth, 2020), it is worth examining what policing models exist, what police staff and professional attitudes fit into them, and what career choice attitudes are associated with them. The emergence of different policing models was aided by the surfacing of more serious public safety problems from the 1960s, and this opened up the door to research that explored the specifics of policing and thus induced organizational and operational changes. Kozáry (2007) describes eight law enforcement (or policing) models. We briefly present the peculiarities of these models, and then analyze which attitudes are prevalent among police officer students. There is a rich literature available that describes policing models, but the categorization system in the present study is based on a different criteria. The aim is to avoid simplification and explore attitudes towards the police organization comprehensively. We assume that different eras held different social expectations towards police officers and while these expectations reinforced and transformed each other, they also led to the police-attitude that is prevalent today.

The War Model

The first policing model was defined in the era of 'war on crime' from the 19th century to the mid-20th century. This era was characterized by conflicts between social groups. The task of police officers during this period was to implement isolation and they were given a special role in segregating those involved in

behaviours and lifestyles that were classified as abnormal. The definition of abnormal behaviour was not clear, as law enforcement agencies decided what was classed as uncivilized and rebellious behaviour. A police officer was considered an honourable citizen. The police intervention, the organization itself took on military features. It is also important to note that the police differed from the military in that the military was constantly present on the streets and was seen by fellow citizens. Their mission can be summed up by waging war on crime. They did all this with the aim of exercising social control over certain individuals and groups who were suspicious. This suspicion was based on prejudice and was a characteristic of police work. Subjectivity was fully present during police interventions. Prejudice is broadly interpreted, and it could have been extended to the rest of the population. The broader population also projected prejudices. The civilian population's view of police officers (Bittner, 1970) of this era was that 'those who fight evil themselves do not live up to the ideas they defend,' Krémer concludes. Consequently, mutual prejudice yielded an adverse effect, and the police occupation in fact did not have the characteristic features of esteem and respect. Citizens did not see police officers as defenders of social peace and public order, but only as defenders of the power of the upper classes.

The Efficiency-based Professional Model

The second model is the efficiency-based professional policing model. This era spans encompasses the period of reform that took place in the United States of America in the 1950s. In this model, efficiency is inseparable from the modernization of the organization. According to Vollmer (1936), the efficiency and quality of policing can only be increased if knowledge in education is raised to higher levels while this is also accompanied by keeping pace with technical progress. Vollmer considered it important to consolidate professional values, as he believed that professionalism contributed to increasing the prestige of police work and this had the positive effect that can be felt when consolidating public safety. Empirical research also came to the fore during this period and provided an opportunity for scientists to conduct research within the police force and other similarly closed organizations. The period under discussion was defined by a continuous and visible police presence, immediate response to emergency calls, and preventive patrols. The expectation of a police officer was to acquire and utilize the knowledge gained in education and to enforce a dominant position.

The Order-maintaining Model

The police forces operating in the 1960s and 1970s are characterised by the order-maintaining policing models. According to Goldstein (1977), the main goal of police officers of this era is to maintain order and peace in their district, and to check and respond immediately to emergency calls. The police saw themselves primarily as the guardian of peace and not the law (Perez,1994). This model, according to which the primary task of a police officer was to maintain order, had its effect until the 1990s. All other tasks, such as criminal investigations, were subordinated to law enforcement. The attitudes of a policeman according to the law enforcement model were determined by the preservation of democratic values in the course of their work. The expectations of a police officer changed significantly: in addition to physical strength, the importance of vocational training and the existence of social sensitivity have increased compared to previous eras. Law enforcement commanded a skilled and professional workforce. Wilson (1973) likened the patrol to a bricklayer who acquires his professional knowledge not from generally written knowledge but through practice, considering that his knowledge of the patrolled area and involvement with the citizens who live there make him a real police officer. It is also characteristic of the policeman of the era that they strive for independence, while boldly using their discretionary power and decision-making ability. The organization of the police force has an extensive control over society and on its events, as opposed to the characteristics presented in the War Model presented earlier. The policing image had also changed, and the paramilitary characteristics became less apparent. Policing attitudes of the age are characterized by the importance of interpersonal relationships.

The Service Model

The fourth model is the Community Policing model, which can also be interpreted as a Service model. It was typical of the 1980s when the relationship between the community and the police underwent significant changes. We can look at this phenomenon as a kind of reconciliation, as the police began to consider the needs of the community. Friedmann (1992) created a model for community policing. According to this, police officers build their professional principles on relationships with communities and viewed the work of the police officer as a community service. U.S. law enforcement has been incorporating elements of this model into their operations since the 1920s. The real breakthrough came in the 1980s,

when close co-operation between the police and the population became prevalent. This has brought with it several positive social changes, as co-operation between citizens also improved significantly. Measuring the effectiveness of the police force, it was found that the number of reported crimes increased during this period. This phenomenon can be seen as social trust, as the citizen making the report trusted the police in that the procedure would reveal the circumstances of the crime and their perpetrators. This co-operation requires the decentralization of power and the sharing of decision-making responsibilities. It presupposes the insight on the part of the police that social peace cannot be maintained alone without the involvement of the population. Measures arising in the course of policing can be interpreted as problems of the community within the framework of the role of the service provider. This model can only be realized if citizens see the police officer as a member of the community who helps them deal with problems as a service provider. The policing and service models are not much different in terms of organizational performance. The essence of the discrepancy is that the service model is more sensitive and pays more attention to the protection of more vulnerable groups (e.g., young, old, poor, homeless). This model assumes a well-developed and sensitive police officer in terms of police attitudes, who integrates into the life of the community and can maintain personal and everyday relationships with the civilian population with the local community. The model of community policing was a defining innovation of the twentieth century, also paving the way for contemporary law enforcement work (Korinek, 2006).

The Problem-oriented Model

The fifth model concerns problem-oriented policing. This model is, in fact, an improved model of community policing, as the third model is based on the work of Goldstein (1977), who does research in law enforcement and interprets its theoretical and practical application. The difference from the previous community model is that this model aims to reform the whole police work and operation and put it on new foundations. The characteristic of his approach is that he considers the maintenance of public safety to be decisive, and expert work and scientific analysis to be a working method. Problem-oriented policing attitudes include a multidisciplinary interpretation of problems, a conscious knowledge of the solution toolkit, and the pursuit of justice to protect public safety. Law enforcement agencies using this model can be characterized as encouraging and using a number of legal means in addition to the use of police presence and coercion to achieve their goals.

The Zero Tolerance Model

The sixth model is known as Zero Tolerance (Kelling, 1982), in fact a modern version of the War Model that is very popular in the 21st century. Its creation can be traced back to the community police presented earlier. Among the police attitudes that can be linked to the model, we can find those values that focus on punishment, are aimed at sanctioning the offender, and do not tolerate any violation of norms. The strategic focus is on police action and not on crime prevention. Rigour and fight against consistent fight against offenders characterize the representatives of this model. The main means of action is punishment, to which deterrence is attributed. The policing aspect of the trend can be attributed to Chief of Police Bratton, who represented the values of community policing in New York in the 1990s, believing that a visible police presence in public places would reduce the number of violent crimes.

The Data Acquisition and Data Processing Model

The seventh model describes data-driven policing. This is the data collection and data processing model. In this framework, the operation of the police is characterised by collaborative task performance, where the systematic collection and evaluation of data connects previously mentioned community policing with the best practice of the problem-oriented model. It can be seen as a new policing model based on evidence-based scientific methodological principles. The main purpose of this law enforcement model is to facilitate data collection and data processing for the sake of addressing community problems. The exchange of data between the different agencies should be smooth in order to ensure a satisfactory quality of analysis. This analytical accuracy can be refined by further training and education of specialists and analysts. The typical police attitude in this system can be characterised by people who organise and discover connections.

The Administrative Model

The eighth model we distinguish within law enforcement is the Administrative Model. Organizational science and public administration distinguish between a deconcentrated model and a municipal police model. If we want to separate the organization according to tasks, competencies and levels of responsibility,

then we distinguish between centralized and decentralized police. The two definitions appear to be the same but contain different conceptual elements. The formation of the U.S. FBI is a system of police institutions that perform centralized activities as defined by the local government system. This model does not define efficiency as a measure but assumes that there are tasks that can be done better centrally and that there are service tasks that make local intervention more successful. If we examine the division of powers, we can see that legality, transparency and control are the determining factors between the different levels. If decentralization does not go hand in hand with the strengthening of democratic values, the elements which guarantee the rule of law may be weakened. The centralized system is continental, while the decentralized model can be found in the literature as the Anglo-Saxon model.

Characteristics of the Hungarian police

Of the eight models described, the Hungarian police can be characterized as a deconcentrated law enforcement body with a strong centralization of powers. Its management is independent and it carries out its activities under the direction of a national police chief. As a strategic goal, it can be described as a reactive police force (Finszter, 2020). In terms of division of labour, the public security and criminal sectors are separated. It has isolated, militaristic features within the administration. Its operation is based on the principles of hierarchical organization and unconditional obedience. It is a repressive type of organization, it is endowed with official authority, which is in the middle of the modernization process (Finszter, 2018; Vári, 2022; Kerezsi, 2020). The ideal policeman is someone with a high degree of professionalism, theoretical and practical knowledge, who sees their career as a profession.

The development of the police attitude

The eight models listed can be combined into four significant and divergent clusters in which police officers have different attitudes. Along with the interpretations of these groups, the police attitude outlines what today's police officer is like and what values and points of reference they carry when choosing a career. The individuals who believe in the values of the war and zero tolerance model, are characterised by repressive, hierarchical, dictatorial attitudes and are endowed with low-level organizational empathy. The professional model based

on efficiency and the data processing model are close to each other and require a policeman who embraces paramilitary values, is open to theoretical knowledge and scientific methods, who considers legal regulation important and is skilled in finding effective solutions. The police officer who trusts in the values of the community and the problem-oriented police model, should be a rational person who is socially sensitive, considers community values and respects the rule of the law. The policing model exhibits classic policing attitudes: it values practical expertise more than theoretical, and it assumes a policeman who is ready to make independent decisions and prioritizes interpersonal relationships.

Law enforcement professionalism

Professionalism is based on knowledge and is characterized by specific professional and social values that presuppose a special vocation (Kleisz, 2000). Its main characteristics include expertise, responsibility, and corporate spirit. Huntington defines professionalism as when civil society is obedient to civilian control. This can be seen as a concept of functional professionalism. According to professional theories, the essential elements of professions are that individuals in the profession possess knowledge that not everyone has, but only those who have mastered the theoretical and practical elements of the training. Entry into the profession is part of a specific, unique process, with defined standards, codes of conduct and rules. Practitioners of the professions can also be characterized by social recognition.

Considering the classifications of professions, policing is one of the auxiliary careers, in the sense that the police officers assist those in need during their work, such as doctors, teachers, social workers, priests, firefighters and military trainers, although there are significant differences in the nature of the work, the target groups and working equipment. Police work is a practice-oriented profession, and the right balance between theoretical, scientific-based knowledge and competence-based training can only be acquired in practice. The skills of a police officer are based on special knowledge (Janza, 2008). Through experiential learning, we can train professionals who protect society.

The professionalism criteria can be discussed from several viewpoints. Of these, we consider the following values to be outstanding:
- the length of vocational training is based on scientific training;
- adherence to rules of conduct and professional ethics;
- consolidation into a professional organization;
- the activity serves the public good;

- the professional activity is organized in an altruistic way;
- professional authority;
- expects individuals to trust their professional competence;
- high degree of collegiality;
- income is not a measure of success, pay depends on the level of education and other criteria;
- practitioners are also expected to apply general and abstract knowledge, so the activity cannot be fully standardized.

Discussion

The efficient operation of public administration is now a basic expectation for the members of society. In order to achieve this, the possibilities provided by science can be called upon in order for the public administration – and thus the police force – to adapt to the needs of the era. Efficiency – by simplifying the conceptual definition – should be understood as the level of subjective sense of security and social acceptance, i.e. the level of integration (Magyary, 1931). The effectiveness of policing can also be observed in the professional competence of police officers and their commitment when carrying out their duties. Citizens feel safe when those working in law enforcement (Szabó, 2014) are endowed with skills that allow legitimate physical violence, and are professionally educated, whilst being conscious of the social purpose of their work and professional guidelines. Police work can be described by several individual and professional attitudes and competencies, including professionalism. Law enforcement has developed the 'theoretical foundations for the professional implementation of guarding public safety'. Breaches of professionalism reduce the social status of police work, whilst increasing police crime and abuses of legitimate violence. This, in turn, leads to an increase in complaints against the police, and a decrease of social trust in members of the organization.

Stone and Travis (2012) summarize the four new principles of the professionalism of the police. These are accountability, legitimacy, innovation and national coherence. The components of true professionalism are a collection of expertise, principles and practices that are recognized and respected by members of the profession. This new professionalism can facilitate effective police cooperation within and outside of the organization. A well-communicated new professionalism can help citizens of different communities understand each police measure and assess the needs and problems that the police need to pay more attention to enjoy the trust of the community. This new professionalism will help all of us

to understand the workings of the law enforcement, how it got to this point, and where it is headed. Knowledge, understanding and practice are vital for good policing, and this common set of skills determines the professionalism of the police. The first professionalism in the United States was embodied into community policing. Decades ago, Géza Finszter (2018) derived the negative findings, which by now worsened: policing is the area of public administration that is most vulnerable to daily improvisations, political battles, and it is the most deprived one of a strategic approach and public service professionalism. The duality of the system's relationship to professionalism can be seen here as the centralized-decentralized police operation. To put it simply, a decentralized police force is closer to the citizens, and consequently is more socially integrated, while a centralized police force is closer to the professional ideal.

Research data, methods

The research project RECPOL was launched in 2010 in Norway. The first survey was based on the StudData questionnaire, which was developed by the University of Oslo. In Norway, this study is also used for examining twenty professions – similar to the Graduate Career Tracking System (DPR) research in Hungary. The first RECPOL survey in 2012 involved seven European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and Spain. We joined this research network in 2016 with the Hungarian sample. Our first data collection took place in August 2017, with a sample of students entering university education. The main questions of the research are grouped around the social and career choice backgrounds of police officer students and their understanding of their professional vision. They also examine the students' expectations regarding police training. The data collection took place in four stages:
- at the beginning of training;
- at the end of training;
- three years after completing the training;
- and six years after completing the training.

The members of the law enforcement organization are members of a specific organizational culture and hierarchy, which is based on education and training. The in-depth understanding of the hidden attitudes is achieved with the use of the RECPOL research questionnaire, as it examines an individual's attitudes towards training and their long-term vision. The RECPOL research also helps us to compare law enforcement trainings internationally and measure their

outcomes. Considering the social and economic differences between countries, in case of a comparative analysis, the formation of students' attitudes is standardized. The questionnaire used in the present study implements the so-called attitude scales which are measured responses using the Likert scale. This type of measurement tool has been developed so that respondents can indicate their agreements or disagreements about specific items, statements and feelings to varying degrees.

In the present study, we analyse the Hungarian RECPOL sample, specifically the responses of full-time police officers studying in higher education. We investigate what attitudes they have towards their profession. The characterization of law enforcement models and the different professional models provide a basis for capturing attitudes and values.

Results

After describing the police models and attitudes, the results of the Hungarian RECPOL survey – a sample of 176 respondents – will be examined. The individuals in the sample were all accepted into higher education and undertook the basic training of full-time police officer training. 68% of the respondents are male and 32% are female. In terms of age distribution, 5% are over 21 years old, 12% are 21 years old, one third of respondents are 20 years old, almost half are 19 years old and 8% are 18 years old. 93% have no work experience and only 6% have worked for more than one year. 17% of the admitted police officer students came from a vocational high school and 78% of them were admitted from a grammar school. 2% had a tertiary education and 7% of respondents started some form of tertiary training that they had to stop due to the police officer training. It is an important finding that almost 90% of the students do not have a direct family member or parent working in the police profession. In the course of career socialization, education and training activities, the key element is which career image the student later brings into the police career.

25% of the respondents' fathers have tertiary education and 70% have secondary education. The educational level of mothers is different, half of the respondents' mothers have a secondary or tertiary education. Regarding the socialization arenas, we asked students about the type of neighborhood they grew up in: nearly 40% of them grew up in a rural area or in a small village, 25% in a small town and 22% in a city but far from the city centre or in a city but far from downtown.

Police attitude and analysis of models

During the analysis, the outcomes of different models were classified separately, as previously summarized. We made a distinction between (1) an 'all-encompassing' model of efficiency and data collection that emphasizes professionalism, (2) a 'service provider' model created from a conglomerate of community policing and a problem-oriented model that emphasizes community and fundamental rights, and (3) a warfare model that focuses on toughness and determination, and a model that 'responds' to the values of the zero tolerance model and the 'classical' framework attitude (4).

Figure 1

Law Enforcement Models, attitudes and main values

Attitude	Law enforcement model	Main value
All-encompassing	Efficiency and Data Collection	Professionalism
Service provider	Community and Problem Oriented	Partnership
Responsive	War and Zero Tolerance	Robustness
Classic	Order-maintaining model	Paternalism

Note. Create by author.

The 'all-encompassing' attitude includes values that require professionalism: reading professional journals, being persistent of wanting to stay in the profession, being emotionally attached to the police career, wanting to belong to a law enforcement organization, and being filled with pride. In the analysis, the dominant elements in the all-encompassing attitude are strong professional commitment (20%) and belonging to the organization and feeling proud (40% and 40%). One-fifth of the respondents can be included in this cluster.

We created the 'service provider' attitude with a mix of several variables, all emphasizing community values. The importance of assessing police work and the need for a trade union is reflected in these values, as well as the fact that it does not have a retaliatory attitude against perpetrators, but rather it gives them an opportunity. Collegiality and professional openness, sensitivity to social problems characterize police officer students who hold a service attitude. 40% of the responding students fall into this category.

A 'responsive' attitude presupposes an individual with firm values. These individuals are not lenient and permissive with offenders, they are in favour of prosecution and are prejudiced in their actions. 60% of respondents have such views and values.

When measuring the 'classical' law enforcement attitude, we classified those with: the attitude of the police officer as a protector of the state, the importance

of respect, adopting common sense when interpreting the law and those who believe that policing is based on experience. Half of police officers think it's natural and acceptable to be noticed based on their appearance. The vast majority of respondents do not take kindly to offenders and agree with their prosecution. Nearly three-quarters of respondents have such attitudes.

Conclusion

The aim of our research was to explore the attitudes of police officer students at the beginning of their university education. We considered it important to find out in which patterns students entering training can identify with the values and views suggested by different law enforcement models. For this, we enlisted the help of eight law enforcement models, which were divided into four clusters. The examined framework can be characterized by different goals and attitudes and we found that we cannot talk about pure attitudes. The plurality of attitudes may vary from one branch of service to another, which may lead to mixed attitudes among respondents. A significant part of the students who start their law enforcement training did not see a pattern in terms of police careers, and their attitudes and views were studded with stereotyped ideas based on the information obtained from a wider circle of acquaintances. We can observe a preconceived police attitude, because when candidates enter the police organization and start practical work, the organizational culture inherits the accepted police attitude and this is when their 'professional blindness' becomes decisive. Our further research is investigating this phenomenon. Furthermore, it is also worth examining how these initial attitudes are transformed and standardized in practical work. Will this be a conflictual or consensual process, or will it be a divisive one? Analyses of our research have shown that full-time police officers start their training with a pluralized police attitude. According to professional theories, the essential element of the profession is that individuals within the profession possess a knowledge that not everyone has, but only those who have mastered the theoretical and practical elements of the training.

Professionalism can be considered the cornerstone of the police profession. In the course of our analysis, it was revealed that behind the visible signals, there are many attitudes, which are also influenced by the system of social and organizational expectations. The explicit need for professionalism appears with different emphasis in the different law enforcement models and their strategies. Professionalism as an attribute accompanying the operation of the police force is also worth evaluating in the comparison of central-hierarchical versus

decentralized models. It should also be noted that professionalism is primarily task-specific in importance and less pronounced as a feature of general policing. In addition to the local decentralized municipal police in modern Western states, central police with a high level of professionalism can be present at the same time. Nowadays, the professionalism of the Hungarian police force can be observed in the case of police officer students because they are working on the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge, to which professional specifics are added as the training progress. Such specific element is, for example, keeping ethical values in mind during work. This attitude contributes to society's acceptance that the functioning of law enforcement agencies is understandable and provides feelings of security. In an organization where professionalism is central, work can be done smoothly, transparently, and predictably.

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