

The responsibility of media in narrowing the gap between PR and the image of law enforcement agencies

Molnár Katalin: *Rendészeti kommunikáció – a média tükrében*

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The book – entitled Law enforcement communication – in the light of the media (original title: Rendészeti kommunikáció - a média tükrében) – was published by Dialóg Campus Publisher in 2018. The author, Katalin Molnár, an Associate Professor at the University of Public Service and trainer of communication, has been doing research in the field of law enforcement communication for nearly thirty years. It can be stated that she has enough expertise to summarise this field. While the author has written several times about the internal communication of the law enforcement agencies in the previous decades, this is her first study on external communication of the law enforcement agencies at such depths. This work was written within the framework of a programme and aimed to renew law enforcement communication.

By charting the field, it is obvious to a researcher that there are few academic literary works on law enforcement communication in the national and international literature. The police, as a paramilitary organisation, have a fairly closed structure; therefore, only a small number of researchers have examined and analysed the communication of law enforcement agencies so far. It can also be said that working for the police is not one of the most widely accepted, socially valued professions in several countries of the world, and the staff's relationship with the citizens is problematic in many cases.

Taking into account that Katalin Molnár is the author of the Police Café method, which was launched seven and a half years ago and adapted primarily to the Hungarian police force, and which encourages this very cooperation, it is understandable why the reader might believe that the author is a communicational expert on the subject. Since publishing the book presented here, an article in English¹ and two blog books have already been published, which demonstrate the spread of the method in Hungary.²

However, let us return to the book *Law enforcement communication – in the light of the media*, which was published as part of a university grant scheme. Al-

1 Molnár, Katalin – Uricska, Erna (2018): The Police Café – An Efficient method for improving the dialogues between the Police and the Community. European Law Enforcement Research Bulletin, Special Conference Editions 2018/ 4, 221–226.p. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3gvCAz5> on 9 October, 2022.

2 Molnár, Katalin (2019): Rendőrkávéházi élményeim. Police Café blogkönyv. [My experiences in the Police Cafés. Police Café blog book] Budapest: Rejtjel Kiadó.

Molnár, Katalin (2020): Újabb rendőrkávéházi élményeim. Police Café blogkönyv 2. rész. [My new experiences in the Police Cafés. Police Café blog book Part 2] Rejtjel Kiadó, Budapest. 2020.

though the work is not available in a printed version, only online as an eBook³, it is pleasing in appearance. Its cover is dominated by blue and red, which cannot be regarded as a coincidence if it is a work on the Police. Furthermore, both the main building of Ludovika and the University of Public Service logo are also printed on the cover, referring to the publisher of the University.

The book consists of two major parts: the theoretical background of law enforcement communication can be found in the first part of the book and a collection of sample texts in the second major unit. In the Introduction, the author briefly presents the structure and chapters of the book, which are the following:

Introduction

1. The social role of the Police
2. The relationship between communication and the Police
3. Law enforcement agencies and their social roles in Hungary
4. Collection of sample texts

Bibliography

Annex

In the introduction of the work, the author briefly guides the reader through the structure and themes of the book and mentions that the work was written for students of the further training course in law enforcement journalism. The aim of the researcher was to improve the communication and writing skills of the would-be law enforcement journalists who – in possession of the acquired knowledge – could support the presentation of law enforcement organisations to the public in a fair and credible manner. The second part of the book provides a description of law enforcement disciplines, and the most typical cases are presented in each area, greatly contributing to a credible showcasing of the external communication of law enforcement organisations over the past two decades.

In the first chapter of the work, the author places the organisation, based on its role, purpose, and mission in society and draws the readers' attention to the fact that in modern democracies the relationship between the citizens and the police is influenced and affected by the quality of their communication to a great extent. In the most general terms, the police provide services to civilians, which include a wide range of communication activities.

The correlation and linkages between communication and the police are discussed in greater detail in the second chapter, emphasizing the necessity of defining the social role of the police. The issue is put into a broader conceptual perspective, namely, into the system of law enforcement communication strategy. The author highlights that law enforcement communication does not have to be a chain of random events, it should instead be a consciously planned process, and this process is explained in detail. In this regard, "a law enforcement communication strategy is a short-, medium-, or long-term, conscious design of how law enforcement agencies

1. present themselves to the outside world;

³ Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/360EYUJ> on 9 October, 2022.

2. facilitate the internal flow of information, and thereby the continuous, high-quality and efficient operation” (Molnár 2018, 9)⁴

Communication is undoubtedly presented as a complex concept. The author refers not only to the verbal and nonverbal elements of communication within the law enforcement communication strategy but also to the static communication elements. The author openly considers that hierarchical and overregulated law enforcement communication is an obstacle to the development of organisational communication and prevents the development of bilateral trust-based dialogue with the citizens. The most frequent written and oral examples of the internal and external communication of the police are also presented in this chapter. Through the review of the history of the Hungarian police, the author discusses the police reforms and, related to them, explains the changes in the internal and external communication processes of the organisation. Molnár also describes how the image of the police preferred by the public has changed over time. The author studies and analyses the external communication of the police and its place in relation to PR and media.

In the third chapter, the book aims to present the legal regulation of the communication and the activities of the press services of the four Hungarian law enforcement agencies: the Police, the National Tax and Customs Administration, the Directorate General for Disaster Management, and the Hungarian Prison Service. Social media platforms are also mentioned as new and potential venues for communication with citizens. However, the author emphasizes that only Disaster Management as an organisation took part in social media communication when the book was being written⁵ in the autumn of 2017. Since then, the departments of the Police and the National Tax and Customs Administration have also appeared on various social networking sites.

The last, fourth chapter of the book contains a collection of sample texts, and through their analysis, the reader can gain insight into the press coverage of the law enforcement agencies. With the help of a trained professional or an expert, the collection of sample texts could serve as an excellent practice book to show how, what, and when the organisations should communicate (or not communicate) and to point out the correct use of communication styles and the proper use of language variants.

In conclusion, the book provides an overview of the internal and external communication of the law enforcement agencies in Hungary. It may serve as a standard and thought-provoking work for those with little or no knowledge of law enforcement communication. However, it also contains much novelty for law enforcement officials, professional experts, and teachers concerned with communication and working in the field of law enforcement. Due to the seriousness, diversity, and complexity of the topic, it is difficult to write about it comprehensively and honestly. However, it is almost impossible to improve law enforcement to a scientific level and represent it as a recognised field without the need for honesty. On the other hand, only by conveying and applying this knowledge can these organisations fulfil

4 Translation by the Author.

5 The manuscript of the book was completed in 2017.

the role they are supposed to represent since only organisations that carry out their function can establish and maintain two-way communication based on trust. And, conversely, only an organisation open to the community can entirely fulfil its role in the community.

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