

# Communication on Social Media as A Function of Quality of Life and Sustainable Development: The Community Policing Perspective

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Cajner Mraović, Irena; Idlbek, Robert; Radić, Ivana

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## FOREWORD

The 12th international symposium on Region, Entrepreneurship and Development (RED 2023) continues to deliver valuable contributions related to the topic. This year we have altogether 53 papers accepted for presentation and publication in the Proceedings. Authors of studies come from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Portugal and Ireland. We witness development and increased interest in sustainability and digital transformation issues that are increasingly present in this years' papers.

In addition to our existing partnering institutions: University of Tuzla, Faculty of Economics in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, The Institute for Scientific and Artistic work in Osijek and University of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Slovenia, the great news is that we have a new partner of RED – the long-time partner of Faculty of Economics and Business in Osijek, Pforzheim University, Germany is our new partner, contributing with new members of Programme and Organizing Committees. Moreover, this years' key-note speakers, prof. Thomas Cleff and prof. Harald Strotmann come from Pforzheim. We are sure this new partnership will further contribute our strive for excellency.

This year we have two key note speeches: one delivered by our above mentioned new partners from Pforzheim with the topic: International accreditation as a means of strengthening the competitiveness of business schools, which, to our opinion is crucial for further education service quality development and the second delivered by our colleague, prof. Slavica Singer on UN Sustainable Development Goals 2050 are a shared 'destination' – does it hold for regional ecosystems?

This year we again announce the Best Paper Award. The Best Paper Award for RED 2023 goes to the paper entitled: The impact of covid-19 pandemic on the SME sector and the policy response in Croatia and North Macedonia, co-authored by Maja Has, Ana Krstinovska and Mirela Alpeza. This paper provided a deeper insight into the impact of the pandemic on the SME sector in Croatia and North Macedonia, and a critical review of the measures taken by governments to support the sustainability of SMEs during the pandemic. Congratulations to the authors and we hope to have them next year with similarly good input.

Hoping that this years' event, just like the previous ones, will be a valuable experience for all the participant, I would like to thank all the members of Programme and Organizing Committee, reviewers and key note speakers for their support and engagement in making RED 2023 the best it could be.

Mirna Leko Šimić



RED 2023 Organizing Committee Chair

*A scientific paper*

**Irena Cajner Mraović, Ph. D., Associate Professor**

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies, Croatia

E-mail address: [icajner@gmail.com](mailto:icajner@gmail.com)

**Robert Idlbek, Ph. D., Assistant Professor**

Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development in Požega, Croatia

E-mail address: [ridlbek@ftrr.hr](mailto:ridlbek@ftrr.hr)

**Ivana Radić, univ. spec. oec.**

Požeško-Slavonska County Police Administration, Croatia

E-mail address: [iradic0@gmail.com](mailto:iradic0@gmail.com)

## COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FUNCTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE COMMUNITY POLICING PERSPECTIVE

### ABSTRACT

*The goal of this qualitative study is to determine the intensity and modalities of police communication on social media and to identify the potential of such communication from the perspective of community policing as a model of police work that prioritises solving problems, preventing crime and public disorder, thus improving quality of life. Because there are almost sixty police officers in charge of public relations in Croatia, a focus group of six such police officers was formed. They represent all four categories of police administrations in Croatia, the Police Directorate and the Civil Protection Directorate. The focus group protocol is based on a semi-structured interview. The results show that social media are primarily used by the Civil Protection Directorate in their daily work because they enable the fastest flow of information necessary for rescuing people and property. Other organisational units use social media in a limited and very selective manner depending on which category of the population they are addressing because different age groups prefer different social media. The research participants agree in the assessment that citizens readily accept this form of communication with the police and are, therefore, more willing to provide information based on which the police can solve problems promptly and prevent crime. The most important finding of this research is that the police often appear cold and impersonal to citizens on other media, while communication on social media gives citizens a sense of connection with the police, which can contribute to strengthening social capital, collective efficacy, and informal social control, which are all critical components of quality of life and sustainable development.*

**Key words:** *social media, police, communication, community, quality of life.*

### 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, the progress of modern technologies has brought rapid changes in communication modalities and is increasingly moving it from the physical to the

virtual space. Such modes of communication are desirable to younger and middle-aged people, and the police must adapt to this to preserve and further develop partnership relations with the community it serves and protects. The COVID-19 pandemic additionally demonstrated the necessity of adapting all social institutions to communication in the virtual space. In a modern democratic society, communication is one of the police's critical tools because its effectiveness in detecting and preventing crime largely depends on information from citizens (Cajner Mraović, Faber, Volarević, 2003; Cordner, 2014; Roberg et al., 2015). This study aims to determine the intensity and modalities of police communication on social media. It also aims to identify the potential of this communication from the perspective of community policing as a model of police work that prioritises police-community partnership in solving problems, preventing crime and public disorder, and thus improving the quality of life and contributing to two UN sustainable development goals: Peace, justice and strong institutions, and Partnership for the goals.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. Community policing

Security is an elementary human need, which in Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs (Cherry, 2022) is right behind the needs for air, water, and food. An inadequate satisfaction of security needs is a direct danger to the physical integrity and life of every human being. For this reason, every modern democratic society treats security as a public good and, therefore, has adequately developed institutions that ensure the security of individuals and communities. The police are an essential part of the security system of every country. The police's role in a modern democratic society is significantly different from their role in different forms of totalitarian regimes (Grant, Grabias & Godson, 2006). A vital component of that difference is related to sustainability and sustainable development. In totalitarian societies, the police do not care equally for the safety of all citizens. Still, their primary task is the protection of political elites, which can even harm the safety of other citizens, especially those who might oppose these political elites. It is clear that such social arrangements are not sustainable and for that very reason, they have appeared in different forms throughout history.

Society entrusted the police with authority to encroach on human rights so that the police could effectively suppress crime and public disorder (Alpert, Dunham, Stroshine, 2015). However, the only and main criterion of police efficiency today is no longer the speed of detection of crime and its perpetrators, but the success in preventing crime (Muir, 2021, 4). To achieve such a goal, partnership cooperation between the police and citizens, as well as the various social groups citizens belong to, from family, neighbourhood, local community to schools, work organisations to civil society associations, is necessary (Scheider, Chapman & Schapiro, 2009). For this reason, community policing has been encouraged and developed for decades in modern democratic states worldwide as a model of police work whose key components are proactive problem-solving and police-community partnerships (Kappeler, Gaines, 2011; Scheider, Chapman & Schapiro, 2009). Proactive problem-solving means acting on risk factors in terms of the occurrence of deviant and criminal behaviour, and impairment of the quality of life in the community (Kappeler, Gaines, 2011). When such problems in the community are solved in a timely manner, "there is a higher level of civility and tranquillity in a community" (Kappeler, Gaines, 2011). The police cannot do this alone. Nevertheless, research and practice show that the police, due to their specific role in society, are suitable for initiating the cooperation of all key stakeholders in the community to solve

particular problems and coordination, which then further develops to the level of collaboration, i.e. partnership (Kappeler, Gaines, 2011; Scheider, Chapman & Schapiro, 2009). Therefore, some authors (Donner & Maskály, 2023) view community policing as a combination of crime prevention techniques and community building.

It is the most precise definition of community policing because it respects the theories on which the community policing model is based, such as Broken Windows Theory, Normative Sponsorship Theory, and Social Resource Theory (Bitaliwo, 2014). All these theories emphasize security and community building; they see adherence to norms and safety as critical prerequisites for community building. The same definition is also compatible with Procedural Justice Theory, which is imperative in modern community policing. It consists of four dimensions: 1) being fair in processes, 2) being transparent in actions, 3) providing an opportunity for voice, and 4) being impartial in decision-making (Skogan, Van Craen & Hennessy, 2014). Respecting these principles in the daily work of the local police contributes to its partnership relations with citizens and stakeholders, which guarantees the safety and sustainability of the community (Schulhofer, Tyler & Aziz, 2013).

The Croatian police have opted for community policing (Borovec, Kutnjak Ivković, 2013) because the traditional, exclusively reactive approach to police activity yields limited results (Kovčo Vukadin, Borovec, Golub, 2013). Although contact police officers and PR officers are the most visible form of community policing, it is as model that includes the entire police organisation because it represents a comprehensive philosophy and not an individual police tactic (Kappeler & Gaines, 2011).

## 2.2. Social media

Already at the beginning of this century, there was an awareness that we are in a new information age, in which the key concepts are networks and networking (Castells, 2000). The Internet and the World Wide Web have been used to encourage social interaction since their appearance. However, during the first decade of this century, there was an evolutionary shift in the social component of their use, largely thanks to the rapid expansion and improvement of Web 2.0 functionality (Obar, Wildman, 2015). In this century, social media have thus very quickly acquired the status of an important business and social phenomenon. But precisely because of this expansive character of social media, defining them is challenging (Obar, Wildman, 2015). Burges, Marwick and Poell (2018), therefore, opted for a minimalist definition according to which social media are digital Internet technologies that enable and facilitate communication and collaboration among their users. With such a definition, they managed to avoid the pitfalls of technological progress and the continuous emergence of new forms of social media. Nevertheless, they question the value of a definition that is so general and imprecise. However, similar solutions were suggested by other authors, so, for example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as Internet applications that enable their users to create and exchange content.

The widespread use of social media by citizens, and especially the broad scale of repercussions of this phenomenon on the performance of police work, have for years increasingly required police organisations around the world to develop and implement police adaptation strategies in terms of the use of social media in their daily work in different lines of work, i.e. different types of police. Thus, social media have become essential to organisational changes in police services. This was the subject of a research study financed by the European Commission between 2010 and 2014. The main goal was to identify and understand the



organisational changes of the police in different European countries. A part of that study explicitly focused on organisational changes related to introducing new information and communication technologies in police practice (Denef et al., 2012). The results showed that, although all police organisations in Europe faced the need to use social media equally, the modalities and dynamics of integrating social media into police activities differ significantly from country to country (Denef et al., 2012).

The same study identified the best practices for integrating social media into police activities. Police can use social media to increase efficiency by obtaining information about criminal acts. Social media are also suitable for presenting police work to the general public. Social media fit well into the community policing model because they enable dynamic interaction between the police and the community (Denef et al., 2012). In question is the fact that communication on social media is bottom-up, opposite to the regular communication within the police, which is hierarchically organised top-down (Denef et al., 2012). However, community policing deviates from that traditional model. It provides police officers more opportunities to make decisions instead of acting on orders because this is the only way to achieve quality communication between the police and the community. Some authors (Tsekeridou et al., 2019) even claim that social media enhance community policing because they enable prompt and straightforward communication between members of the police and members of the community, which significantly contributes to the quality of cooperation and the creation of a partnership between the police and the community.

### **3. Current study**

Not all European countries, Croatia among them, participated in the previously mentioned European Commission study. Therefore, it is worth investigating the situation ten years later, when the use of social media is even more intense and almost imperative in various spheres of personal and social life. This study aims to answer two research questions:

- (1) Which social media does the Croatian police use in public relations and to what extent?
- (2) How and to what extent does the Croatian police use social media to establish partnerships with the community?

Traditionally, the police have relied on their public relations officers to inform the public, but this approach only allows for one-way communication, leaving citizens as passive recipients of information. To establish a stronger partnership between the police and the community, fostering open and quality two-way communication is essential. While social media platforms present a promising opportunity to facilitate dialogue, the Croatian police only authorize their public relations officers to communicate through social media. Given the critical role that public relations officers play in community policing, this study focuses on their practices.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Sample**

The target population consists of 57 employees in charge of police public relations in twenty police administrations covering the territory of twenty counties in Croatia, the Police Directorate and the Civil Protection Directorate. The sample of six respondents, consisting of 5 women and 1 man, was formed in the manner that the competent department of the Ministry

of the Interior was provided with the criteria, in order for them to identify the members of the target population meeting the criteria. The criteria were the following: the total number not amounting to less than 10% of the target population, at least 10 years of work experience in the current position, same sex ratio in the sample and the target population, as well as inclusion of all four categories of police administrations, the Police Directorate and the Civil Protection Directorate. None of the selected police officers refused to participate in the study.

#### **4.2. Instrument and data collection**

The conversation was conducted online based on a semi-structured interview in November 2021. The modalities and intensity of using social media in the structured part of the questionnaire have been covered by the following questions:

- (1) Which digital channels and social media do you use to communicate with citizens?
- (2) Which citizens do/could you address via social media?
- (3) Can posts on social media negatively affect the public perception of the police?
- (4) Is it possible to influence public opinion about the police using social media?  
How?
- (5) Do you consider it appropriate for the police to communicate with the public about completed criminal investigations, and missing and wanted persons via social media?

The modalities and intensity of using social media to establish partnerships with the community have been covered by the following questions that include the four dimensions of the Procedural Justice Theory:

- (1) Would improving police communication using social media increase the number of contacts with citizens?
- (2) Do the police use social media to respond quickly to emergencies and arrest criminals?
- (3) Does the contact of citizens with the police via social media enable equal treatment of different social groups? (impartiality)
- (4) Can improving police communication on social media increase people's obligation to act as requested by the police? (fairness)
- (5) Should the police use social media to explain certain decisions and reasons for specific actions? (transparency)
- (6) Does the communication of the police with citizens on social media enable receiving a greater number of reports compared to other forms of communication? (voice)
- (7) Does communication on social media help the police to solve social problems through involvement of and cooperation with citizens?

The study was carried out in accordance with ethical standards for conducting research on human subjects, and it has received the necessary approvals for its implementation. Participation in the focus group was voluntary and anonymous. Initially, the participants were presented with the goal, manner of working, and rules of conduct during this type of research. Each participant was informed of the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time. Two moderators led the conversation. The conversation lasted 90 minutes.

#### **4.3. Data analysis**

The study's codes were derived from the questions asked during the focus group discussions. The first topic codes were based on research conducted by the European Commission (Denef



et al., 2012), and the second topic codes were based on the dimensions described by Procedural Justice Theory. However, the analysis revealed the need for additional codes to account for the earthquake's impact and the lack of police officers for public relations.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Modalities and intensity of use of social media in police work

All study participants use e-mail to communicate with citizens, while the Civil Protection Directorate uses Facebook and Twitter. In connection with COVID-19, they also created a Viber group that informs citizens about current events. It was essential during the intensive implementation of measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic because these measures changed depending on the number of infected people in an area. Hence, citizens had many questions on a daily basis.

*"In Zagreb, when there was an earthquake, and in Petrinja as well, people in such situations run away from danger, they don't sit in front of the television, they can't be informed in that way, in such situations, it is best to send information via social media."*

Facebook has proven useful mainly for communicating with middle-aged and even elderly people, while Twitter is predominantly for the younger and middle-aged population. The Civil Protection Directorate has good experiences with both social media mentioned, encouraging considering about the desirable expansion to other social media.

*"Young people also use Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Different social media should be used in parallel to be able to cover everything. Just for that purpose, the police should have a sufficient number of people, and priorities should be clear, as well as what should be communicated most to citizens and to what categories of the population."*

*"Today, everyone is on social media. I know people who are 80 or over 80 and are regularly on Facebook. Young people are constantly using new social media. It is questionable to what extent we could keep up with the number of employees we have. The worst thing would be if we were not consistently present because you cannot provide people with information and then stop doing so. Either you do it or you don't."*

An additional severe limitation to the better use of social media in police work is the comments on social media that could negatively affect the perception of the police. Some study participants consider this to be a major problem because communication on social media is fast and widely available, so the damage caused by negative comments is difficult to repair.

*"This is always going to be present. Always. Once a negative comment is posted, then the others just follow. It's best not to read further or at least not immediately because it's not always good to react right away."*

*"In such situations, I think to myself: let it sit for a while."*

Some study participants are not concerned about negative comments on social media.

*"There will always be negative comments. We will never have 100% positive comments. That's my opinion because this is how things are in general."*

*"Whoever is against you is always against you, and that's it."*

When the study participants were asked to evaluate the possibilities of a positive impact of police communication via social media on public opinion about the police, emphasised as the crucial factors were speed and immediacy in the exchange of information on social media w.

*"What always bothers people about police reports is their uniformity and coldness. Communication on social media is lively and always original. There are no patterns or complicated expressions, and people like that."*

*"Our releases are one-way. Even when there is a press conference, only journalists ask questions. Citizens read or watch it. That was enough ten years ago, not any more today. Otherwise, we would establish a police radio station and just broadcast the news, but that doesn't work any more. Communication should be two-way because we also want two-way cooperation. We also need information from citizens, not only citizens from us."*

The research participants, therefore, recognise the need for partnership cooperation between the police and citizens, but they also are aware of the need for partnership cooperation between different social institutions. In this regard, another major issue was highlighted, mainly in the areas that were hit by the earthquake in December 2020. People have various inquiries because many residents are still living in temporary accommodation and reconstruction has been delayed. Nevertheless, the information is not provided in a timely manner and is not entirely relevant. The study participants agree that quality cooperation between different public departments and institutions is necessary in such crises, which only exists with adequate communication. Only in such as situation is prompt and content-precise communication with citizens possible.

*"In a situation like an earthquake, we are involved in many other professions from which you have to collect information... The problem is the cooperation of those other bodies, state bodies, to provide you with good information. We said we were going to be honest here, so unfortunately, I have to say that this is still non-existent here. At least not everywhere. Some bodies work perfectly, cooperate well, but there are also those from which you can't even get it even in point form. And how can you do your job of informing the public, and you don't have that information, or you don't know what the correct information is if you have conflicting information, or you don't know who the expert is? We must stand behind what we communicate to citizens, and how can we do this in such situations?"*

It follows from the above that the research participants are very focused on their difficulties in communicating with citizens. Even when asked about the positive aspects, they return to the negative ones. Therefore, in the conversation, they had to be brought back to thinking about the current and potential positive effects of communication via social media on public opinion about the police.

*"It depends on what you are conveying at a specific moment. But also through some nice things, such as the Civil Protection Directorate, our dog Gizmo, the most famous paw in Croatia, rescue from the ruins... People like good things, so even when there is hardship, there is always a silver lining."*

*"Yes, and to show us in those stories, we are only people. We have our good sides, and we have our bad sides as well. The worst thing is without emotion."*

*"Now that we're talking about positive influences, at least how we do it in our police department, when we find time, when we have a press release, of course, the media reports it the way it suits them, but then we put it on our Facebook page as a warm, human story along with the press release. Of course, there will be haters and various comments, but sometimes there may be some new findings for us within those comments. We always follow it on various portals because there are some things we wouldn't know about if we hadn't read them in the comments on those portals."*

*"Operationally valuable information can be found on Facebook. We use it to solve a crime, and resounds positively in the community. People appreciate us when we are efficient."*

All study participants agree that it is appropriate and valuable for the police to communicate with the public about completed criminal investigations related to crimes and misdemeanours, missing and wanted persons, and other forms of deviant behaviour.

*"We have had cases when some things have disappeared, and we put it on Facebook, and people contact us with information, and things are found in that way. I think this is ok, at least here. I don't know how other police departments work."*

It follows from this part of the conversation that this practice is different in different police administrations, but all research participants equally recognise great potential in it. However, they also emphasise the issue of available human resources.

*"It's all great, but it must be taken care of."*

*"We're getting the work done, slowly, but it's getting done..."*

## **5.2. Using social media to establish police-community partnerships**

Regarding the previously elaborated topic of the focus group, study participants of their own volition mentioned the need to continuously raise the intensity and quality of cooperation between the police and citizens. In this sense, they highlighted the possibilities provided by social media. They undoubtedly recognise the potential, of which they have no doubt, but they assess their resources for realising the potential as questionable. This is probably the reason why they seemed confused when asked if they think improving police communication via social media would increase the number of police contacts with citizens.

*"Yes, we definitely would. But this brings us back to the previous problems: staff capacity and the number of people dealing with it. The worst thing is if citizens ask for something, and we lack people... There are other problems: not only the number of people, but also their level of education, the technical capacities... a bunch of additional, secondary things will also have an effect... it's not that we don't recognise*

*opportunities for more and better communication with citizens, but the question is what we can realistically do. "*

*" I have an example: we have a perfect young employee, she is educated specifically for social media, she is communicative, she likes to do it, she understands the job very well, but the problem is she doesn't get around to it even though social media are her area of expertise! She has to do other tasks, a lot of them and demanding ones. She has to do a hundred other tasks because there are very few of us. When the coronavirus and the earthquake started, we worked almost 24 hours a day, and it was fine for a while, but then health begins to suffer... and then another issue comes up: the issue of satisfaction, wages..."*

*"We lack technology. We lack people. We lack knowledge. In our case, just one colleague is competent in social media. She knows the apps. She knows how it all works. The rest of us learned from her or taught ourselves. That can be ok, but only to a certain extent, otherwise, the same issues arise: satisfaction, wages... To be clear: first, you need satisfied employees, and then you can expect them to make citizens satisfied as well."*

All the study participants expressed their displeasure that they could not adequately devote themselves to improving communication between the police and citizens. In this regard, they presented several examples of their daily frustrations related to limitations: limitations of available time, limitations resulting from official rules, and constraints associated with the available technology.

*"It destroys your will to work when one minute you're doing one thing, the next minute you're doing something completely different, and soon afterwards you have to rush to a press conference. It doesn't work. It's impossible..."*

*"We always have some kind of limitations: either you can't access something, or your Internet is poor, or your computer is slow..."*

Interestingly, the conversation continued in the direction of internal communication and relations within the police, although the topic is related to external communication and relations between the police and citizens. Study participants agree that unrealistic expectations are often placed before them, impairing their ability to communicate well with citizens. Therefore, the following question about whether the police use social media to react in emergencies and arrest criminals quickly was useful to steer the conversation back to the default topic. However, it was also partly addressed in the last part of the conversation, which referred to the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the situation after the earthquake. Some participants have concrete experiences in this regard, and those who do not state that they perceive vast possibilities. The Civil Protection Directorate proved to be the most experienced, with social media become increasingly important in their daily work due to their reach, availability and speed of information flow. Interestingly, this does not only apply to the reactive part of their work, but also they see a substantial proactive and preventive potential in communication via social media.

*"So that is what is important to us. Regardless whether it's an earthquake or a flood, which is less common, but often there is a forecast of a storm, and then you can send a message to all users in a certain area for which it is forecast, and everyone online can see it immediately."*

In this part of the conversation, the study participants once again emphasised the importance and necessity of the partnership between the police and the community. This is the only way to achieve the ultimate goal: safety and quality of life.

Interestingly, the research participants did not understand the question of whether citizens' contact with the police via social media enables equal treatment of different social groups. The reason for this misunderstanding was that they do not differentiate between people according to any criteria in their work. That is, they treat everyone equally. They identify the opposite risk with social media because they are not equally accessible to all citizens. Some citizens will, therefore, be deprived of important information and communication with the police. In their opinion, this risk is higher for people of lower financial status, who, therefore, lack adequate equipment for communication via social media and for people in those geographical areas where Internet availability is poorer. To some extent, they also see a risk for the elderly. However, they repeat the previous statements that the situation is changing rapidly and that one only needs to take care of which social media are preferred by which age group.

The study participants were very selective in their answers to whether improving police communication via social media can strengthen people's sense of obligation to act as the police require. They correctly identified the dimension of the Procedural Justice theory that is key here: fairness.

*"There is no correlation between the number of messages and the obedience of citizens. At least, I cannot see it. It is more a matter of trust in these messages, whether the source that posts them has such a status that it can be trusted."*

*"If we tweet a lot and are honest, fair and help people, then ok, then they will also be honest and fair with us, and help us when we need them. But if communication is not two-way, if we only tweet a lot and there is nothing else behind it from our side, then we cannot expect anything from citizens either, possibly disappointment and even less willingness to cooperate."*

*"So if the police tweets about something and a person then asks for help from us, and we do help them, then the next time that person sees that the police is asking for something, they will think, ok, they helped me, now I'm going to try to help them. And that has nothing to do with the number of tweets and posts, but how we work."*

In response to the question of whether the police should use social media to explain certain decisions and the reasons for specific actions, the research participants were not so elaborate. Although everyone answered the question in an affirmative manner, there was no discussion, which can partially be attribute to the length of the conversation. However, the option that they are less familiar with transparency as a dimension of the Procedural Justice Theory compared to fairness and impartiality should be considered.

Similar to the above were the answers to whether police communication with citizens via social media enables receiving more reports (of various issues) compared to other forms of communication. The moderator's additional clarification that police officers should listen to and show interest in what people want to say even if they cannot help them has affected the study participants in an unexpected way. Instead of recognising voice as a dimension of the Procedural Justice Theory, they associated it with cases in which citizens had unrealistic expectations from them.

*"Hmmm... No. Because then the following situations will happen: for example, someone sends something, writes a scam on WhatsApp and sends a screenshot and*



*nothing else, so now it's no longer my problem but yours. You cannot work in that way because if someone has suffered damage, he or she still has to do a bit more than send a single message. We have already said that nothing works without two-way communication."*

*"I agree with my colleague because, especially by email, we receive all kinds of screenshots. However, it is better for people to physically come to the station because they will then provide more information."*

In the answers to the question of whether communication via social media helps the police to solve social problems, in addition to involving and cooperating with citizens, beneficial information was also obtained, such as, for example, the inability to perform the work of contact police officers adequately. These are police officers on patrol whose task is to act proactively in a precisely defined territory. There are about 700 of them throughout the entire country, which is a valuable potential, but due to insufficient numbers of them, they have less and less time for proactive work and mostly perform police interventions. To a certain extent, police officers in the prevention service and police officers for public relations try to compensate for this. The research participants provide examples of their involvement in humanitarian campaigns and other initiatives important to the community.

*"We try to do not only police work, but to expand it a bit so that we are constantly present in the community."*

From this statement, however, it is evident that the presence of the police in the community is still separated from the myth of "real" police work.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

In parallel with changes in the social context, the police necessarily change its role in society. Thus, the tools used by the police in their daily work also change. This was shown by the results of this qualitative research, the participants of which were police officers in charge of public relations. Although they do not perform typical police tasks such as police patrols, police interventions in response to citizen reports, road traffic control or criminal investigations, they play an essential role in detecting and preventing crime and maintaining the state of security in an area, because they are in continuous communication with the community. The more intensive, two-way, and interactive this communication is, the better the effect is for the police and the community. The police need the information they receive from citizens because police officers can only be present at some places and not everywhere. The local population knows their surroundings best and can quickly spot anything suspicious, risky or, in any other way, different from the usual situation. The community also needs information from the police, which is especially important in some extraordinary circumstances, when there is a danger to people and property. According to the results of this study, it is precisely in such situations that the police use social media the most, which shows that complete application of social media in police communication has yet to be found. Moreover, the research showed both that there are still vast possibilities for communication via social media and considerable objective obstacles related to limitations in the number of police officers, their competence for the use of social media, and the available technology.

It is important to note that this research pointed to similar vital facts about the Croatian police as the research conducted a few years ago by Cajner Mraović and Faber (2016), a kind of disparity between internal and external procedural justice. Both surveys showed that police officers undoubtedly understand the need to connect with the community and, therefore, strive to achieve the highest possible quantity and quality of communication with citizens and

stakeholders. Nevertheless, at the same time, they feel that the relevant and sufficient prerequisites for this are missing within the police system. Although the public often has distorted ideas about the police as an organisation that can do everything only because it has powers that other social actors do not have, which then results in the often unrealistic expectations of the public from the police, the police organisation is subject to the same organisational laws as any other organisation. In this research, the participants clearly warned of the negative consequences of such circumstances in terms of loss of job satisfaction and then job motivation.

The concept of procedural justice is crucial for the police because they need to ensure that people adhere to the norms, which is one of the critical prerequisites for safety and quality of life and, thus, the sustainability of the community. Initially, this concept arose as an effort to answer the question of why people adhere to norms (Tyler, 1990). This question deviates from traditional criminology positions, which focus on identifying risk factors of deviant behaviour. It seeks to understand why people do not adhere to norms (Jackson et al., 2011, 5). From the aspect of safety and quality of life, both questions are important because the answers provide guidelines for the work of social control bodies. In developing the concept of procedural justice, it was identified that it could be divided into two components: internal and external. Research shows their mutual connection (Donner & Olson, 2020). Therefore, the police can only expect a partnership with the community if quality communication and cooperation dominate within the police system.

In addition to the fact that the participants of this study directly verbalised a particular discrepancy between internal and external procedural justice, the same is indirectly indicated by other findings obtained through this study. Thus, it was shown that study participants undoubtedly respect and practice two of the four dimensions of procedural justice: fairness and impartiality. It is essential to know that the Croatian police act fairly and equally towards all citizens. However, it is equally important to note that there are still specific barriers in terms of transparency and especially voice. It can be assumed that the origin of these barriers can be partly be attributed to the police and partly to the community. The police are a hierarchical organisation. It is very demanding for police managers, especially middle-level managers, to maintain a strict hierarchy and all aspects of internal procedural and organisational justice. This problem can be solved through a system of additional professional training and development. However, for this to be truly effective, a clear strategic orientation is needed at the highest levels of police system management so that there can be more human and material resources for implementing the police strategy in the community. The issue from the perspective of the community is the need for more and adequate information about the police, which often results in unrealistic expectations of citizens from the police. It is possible to act on this problem by increasing the intensity and quality of communication between the police and the community. Research conducted in a dozen European countries (Denef et al., 2012, 24) showed that social media are suitable for informing the public about police and police work. This is extremely important because it is unrealistic to expect a partnership from actors who need to learn about and understand each other sufficiently.

This study certainly has its limitations in terms of the number of participants and the duration of the focus group. However, the fact that its results show an internal coherence based on a relevant theoretical framework and that they are consistent with some earlier research carried out on larger samples of police officers certainly give rise to the previously highlighted practical implications, but also to future research directions that should identify the relationship between internal and external procedural justice in the Croatian police, as well as

its fundamental strategic determinants. Based on these findings, it would be possible to plan relevant further improvement of the functioning of the police and to remove the current personnel and material barriers in achieving a partnership with the community. In this way, the police can best contribute to realising the UN's sustainable goals concerning partnership and peace, justice and strong institutions, that is, to the sustainability of the communities it serves and protects.

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