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# The community policing evaluation in the Croatian urban and rural communities

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## Abstract

*Community policing has been one of the contemporary models of policing implemented in Croatia. It was accepted in the early 2000s, within the framework of reforms that were planned to bring the Croatian police closer to the European standards of modern democratic policing after the war and post-war circumstances of the 1990s. The aim was to rebuild police legitimacy and, through citizens' trust in the police, to promote collective efficacy and informal social control. There are serious concerns as to whether this model achieves results regarding implementation-related issues that are common across the world, but particularly typical for post-socialist central and south-east European countries. In the first place, some improvisations of community policing are likely to occur, because the community policing model is more or less adopted on a declarative level, without the substantial understanding of its fundamental principles and lack of basic requirements. Starting from one of the central premises of community policing — that not police alone, but the whole community is responsible for community safety — community policing strategy in Croatia includes several projects aimed to improve relations between the police and the public and to bring together all relevant stakeholders in managing security and safety concerns. Therefore, in this study, the level of implementation of community policing has been analysed from the point of view of four sets: quality of police contact, perception of the level of crime and disorder, fear of victimisation and level of community cohesion. Considering dilemmas about the effectiveness of the community policing model in different social contexts, one urban and one rural community in Croatia have been compared. Due to small samples being the main limitation of this study, the results are representative for specific communities only and cannot be generalised, but could serve as a good foundation for future research.*

## Keywords:

*community policing, evaluation, urban community, rural community, Croatia*

## Introduction

Many scholars (Champion and Rush, 1997; Edwards, 2000; Brogden and Nijhar, 2005; den Heyer, 2011; Kempa, 2012) claim that the community policing model is best suited to achieving democratic policing principles because of various community policing goals, such as problem solving; police collaboration with various public and private organisations; decentralisation; and the commitment to democratising all public institutions, including the police. As in many other post-socialist countries (Goldsmith, 2003; Meško and Lobnikar, 2005; Meško, 2009; Lobnikar and Meško, 2010), in Croatia the police have adopted community policing philosophies and practices within the framework of the democratisation process and the transfer of policing notions from the West after the sociopolitical changes in the 1990s. The beginnings of community policing in Croatia date back to 2003, when experts from the Ministry of the Interior developed a new strategy for police activities and launched its implementation.

That process of transformation can be summarised in six projects that were implemented in order to achieve the successful transformation of the police, from individual police officers to the organisation as a whole. The projects were: (1) reform of the uniformed police; (2) development and enhancement of crime prevention; (3) organisation of preventative measures in local communities; (4) reform of public relations; (5) reform of police education and the professional development system (Ministry of the Interior, 2004); and (6) internal democratisation of the police (Ministry of the Interior, 2009). The new posts of 'contact police officer' and 'police officer for prevention' were introduced, representing the backbone of the reform of uniformed police. The police were given the opportunity to establish coordinating bodies, consisting of representatives of both citizens and the police. Together, they identify problems in the community and highlight priorities for their resolution. First, such bodies known as prevention councils were established in 2004 and since then a total of 167 prevention councils have been established. There were lot of issues regarding the implementation of community policing in Croatia, due to its rapid introduction and deficient understanding of its fundamental philosophy and basic requirements, but primarily because of legislative regulations that failed to provide the police with such extensive discretion as in countries from which the modern philosophy of community policing originated. Problems are largely related to a lack of flexibility in solving problems in complex situations and a rigid and legalistic mentality amongst the majority of police officers. Despite the fact that a lot of individual enthusiasm as compensation for system deficiencies has been invested and lots of good work has been done during almost 15 years, which has resulted in many positive changes in the police and in the community, without such insights we cannot know anything about the sustainability of these changes.

This is a substantial risk because, as Kappeler and Gaines (2011: 91) are warning, history shows 'that change takes time and that, at any given moment, the past and the future coexist' and 'signs of the past can often repeat themselves and reformers must be concerned that history finds well-meaning solutions to the problems of crime, policing and accountability

stifled and abused by institutional and social forces'. At the moment, we know that community policing is an acceptable policing model for the Croatian police and Croatian citizens, but we do not know how serious such threats could be to its implementation in the future. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of implementation of community policing on citizens' perceptions and to compare the level of implementation on community policing between a specific urban community in the city of Zagreb and the rural community in Međimurje County in Croatia.

## Methodology

### Sample description

Data was collected from citizens of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, and Međimurje County (the capital is Čakovec). Statistical analysis included 99 citizens from New Zagreb, which is one of the most urbanised parts of Zagreb, and 161 citizens from Međimurje County. Međimurje County is demographically also one of the most developed counties in the Republic of Croatia. With a population density of 156 residents per square kilometre, Međimurje County is among the most densely populated Croatian regions. Only the city of Zagreb has a higher population density. The population density in the city itself is 1 200 people per square kilometre. Data was collected from citizens on a voluntarily basis in public places. The smallness of the sample size is a major limitation of the present study. The results are representative of the specific community only and cannot be generalised, but could serve as a good foundation for research in other Croatian regions. In the following tables, the main demographic data of the sample are presented.

### Instrument

The question of the measurement of community policing implementation was analysed by Adam J. McKee (2001), who published the article entitled 'The community policing evaluation survey: reliability, validity and structure' and defined the measurement of community policing implementation with four interrelated concepts. These were: (1) quality of contact between the police and local residents; (2) the perception of the level of crime and disorder; (3) fear of victimisation and; (4) level of community cohesion.

The first part of the questionnaire consists of questions referring to the quality of contact between the police and citizens. The second part of the questionnaire includes questions on the perception of crime and disorder, and the third part refers to fear of victimisation. The fourth set consists of questions on community integration. The last part of the questionnaire refers to demographic data. Respondents rated their satisfaction with community policing using a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The claims made by the authors were adjusted to suit the Croatian cultural environment. A higher value in the first set of questions (quality of contact between the police and the citizens) means that the respondents believe the police have good quality contact with citizens; in the second set of questions (perception of crime and

disorder) a higher value means that respondents do not see crime and disorder as a problem in their community; in the third set of questions (fear of victimisation), a higher value means that respondents are not afraid of victimisation in their community; in the fourth set of questions (community integration) a higher value means a higher level of community integration.

**Table 1**  
Quality of police contact

	Place (seat of county)	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	STAT. SIG. DIFF.
How good of a job do you think the police in this area are doing in helping people out after they have been victims of crime?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	2.94 <b>3.08</b>	1.062 1.158	YES t = 43.00; p = .015
In general, how polite are the police in this area when dealing with people around here?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	3.35 <b>3.57</b>	.831 1.080	YES t = 31.455; p = .020
In general, how helpful are the police in this area when dealing with the people around here?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	2.99 <b>3.47</b>	1.055 1.142	YES t = 13.458; p = .047
In general, how fair are the police when dealing with people around here?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.09</b> 3.01	.869 1.035	YES t = 76.250; p = .008
How good a job are the police doing in keeping order on the streets and in public places?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	3.17 <b>3.35</b>	1.062 1.043	YES t = 36.222; p = .018
Quality of police contact scale	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	15.54 <b>16.48</b>		YES
1-low; 5-high; min 5; max 20; a higher value means that the respondents believe that the police have good quality contacts with citizens.					

## Results and discussion

The differences are clearly statistically significant in respondents from Zagreb and Međimurje County with regard to all variables, as p is below 0.05 (Table 1). The respondents from Zagreb evaluated the quality of contact with police officers significantly higher statistically. In all cases (except regarding the fairness of police when dealing with people), the average is above 3 on the 5-point scale. Contact between the police and local residents is important as well — what the local residents think of the police has a direct impact on the possibility of a partnership between the police and the community and can influence the willingness of the population to act in conformity with the law. The respondents from Novi Zagreb evaluated the contact with the police significantly higher statistically in four out of five questions.

Namely in Novi Zagreb the respondents think the police are more helpful when dealing with the people and that the police are better at keeping order on the streets and in public places in Zagreb than in Međimurje County. These also have significant influence on the 'quality of police contact' scale, where the score is significantly higher in Novi Zagreb than in Međimurje County.

**Table 2**

Perceptions of crime and disorder scale

	Place (seat of county)	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	STAT. SIG. DIFF.
How big of a problem is people breaking windows out of buildings in the area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>2.99</b> 3.16	1.275 1.243	YES t = 36.76; p = .018
How big of a problem is people drinking in public places in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>2.99</b> 3.06	1.196 1.276	YES t = 86.429; p = .007
How big of a problem is people being attacked or beaten up by strangers in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.67</b> 3.77	1.161 1.132	YES t = 74.400; p = .009
How big of a problem is people being robbed or having their money, purses or wallets taken?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>2.80</b> 3.43	1.208 1.099	NO t = 9.889; p = .064
How big of a problem is vacant lots filled with rubbish and junk in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	2.88 <b>2.20</b>	1.242 1.229	NO t = 7.471; p = .085
Perceptions of crime and disorder scale	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>15.33</b> 15.62		
1-low; 5-high; min 5; max 20; a lower value means that respondents see crime and disorder as a problem in their community.					

The level of crime and disorder, as perceived by the population, has a direct and strong impact on the quality of life in a community. There are significant differences between two samples in three variables (Table 2). The Međimurje County respondents think that problems with people breaking windows or drinking in public places is bigger than in Zagreb, and their perception is the same regarding the problem of people being attacked or beaten up by strangers. All of the averages in the case of Međimurje County respondents are below 3. There are no significant differences between two samples — the perception of the problem of being robbed or having money taken, and the problem with rubbish.

**Table 3**

Personal fear of victimisation scale

	Place (seat of county)	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	STAT. SIG. DIFF.
How worried are you that someone will try to rob you or steal something from you when you are outside in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.30</b> 3.45	1.234 1.288	YES t = 45.000; p = .014
How worried are you that someone will try to break into your home while someone is there?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	3.48 <b>3.44</b>	1.146 1.303	YES t = 173.000; p = .004
How worried are you that someone will attack you or beat you up when you are outside in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	3.87 3.87	1.050 1.157	ISTE AR.SREDINE Sd. = 0.00
How worried are you that someone will try to steal or damage your car in this area?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	3.58 <b>3.32</b>	1.223 1.316	YES t = 144.000; p = .004
How worried are you that someone will try to break into your house while no one is there?	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>2.86</b> 2.90	1.297 1.329	YES
Personal fear of victimisation scale	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	17.09 <b>16.98</b>		
1-always; 5-never, min 5; max 25; a lower value means that respondents are afraid of victimisation in their community.					

The fear of victimisation weakens community cohesion, which consequently loosens and annuls informal mechanisms of social control. One of the main premises of community policing is that informal control mechanisms, and not the police, assure order in the neighbourhood/community. There are significant differences between two samples: the respondents from Međimurje County are more worried that someone would try to rob them/steal something from them/someone would try to break into their house while no one is there than inhabitants from Zagreb (Table 3). The respondents from Zagreb are more worried that someone would try to break into their home while someone is there and that someone would try to steal or damage their car. Both samples of respondents are equally worried that someone would attack or beat them up when they are out of their home.

**Table 4**

Community cohesion scale

	Place (seat of county)	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	STAT. SIG. DIFF.
If I were sick I could count on my neighbours to shop for me at the supermarket, go to the drug store, etc.	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.73</b> 3.56	1.341 1.387	YES t = 42.882; p = .015
When I am away from home, I can count on some of my neighbours to keep their eyes open for possible trouble.	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.80</b> 3.71	1.293 1.416	YES t = 83.444; p = .008
If I had to borrow EUR 25 for an emergency, I could turn to my neighbours.	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.73</b> 3.26	1.355 1.489	YES t = 14.872; p = .043
The people in this area work together to solve problems.	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	2.75 <b>2.81</b>	1.221 1.353	YES t = 92.667; p = .007
I know several people in this area well enough to ask a favour.	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>3.64</b> 3.44	1.217 1.387	YES t = 35.400; p = .018
Community cohesion scale	Čakovec ZG - Novi Zagreb	161 99	<b>17.65</b> 16.78		YES
1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree; min 5; max 25; a higher value means a higher level of community integration.					

For the fourth and final factor (community integration), a higher value of the variable means strong community integration. If community cohesion is weak, the community cannot act as a control agent. Therefore, if we seriously want to study the possibility of community policing, we also have to focus some attention on community cohesion. In Table 4 we can see that there are statistically significant differences between two samples in all items. Community cohesion is rather high in Međimurje County, except in the case of joint problem solving. Neighbourhood watch and mutual aid are more present in the case of Međimurje County residents. They are more convinced that when they are away from home, they can count on some of their neighbours to keep their eyes open for possible trouble.

### Concluding remarks: are the differences between the urban and the rural community fading away?

Considering that community policing has been the officially accepted model of policing in Croatia for more than a decade, we are interested in the effectiveness of the model in both social settings — urban and rural ones. These differences stem from the substantial changes in lifestyles, social organisation and political and economic conditions that have occurred over the past 10 years.

Due to small samples being the main limitation of this study, given results are representative for specific communities only and cannot be generalised, but could serve as a good

foundation for future research. However, they indicate the quality of contact between police and citizens in both observed areas, and the most important safety problems of their inhabitants.

In Međimurje County there is a lack of contact with the police, a high level of perception of crime and disorder, existence of personal fear of victimisation and a high level of community cohesion. Although they are living in detached houses, there is a high level of population density in Međimurje County. They gravitate towards the bigger cities in the surrounding areas and their lifestyle has developing urban features. There is an ongoing urbanisation process in rural societies, which on the one hand have strong links with a typical rural lifestyle, and at the same time enjoy the benefits and disadvantages of urbanisation.

Due to the homogeneity of the population, there is a high level of social cohesion; however, they recognise that only when they are in distress and/or left on their own. They are not involved in joint problem solving for the benefit of the community. Therefore, other rural areas in Croatia must be researched. In addition, our understanding of the rural community must be explored, as the rural lifestyle has changed.

In the city of Zagreb, the main fear is that someone would break into their home or would steal their car. However, there is the perception that there is good communication with the police and a preference for joint problem solving. Due to a more heterogeneous population, migration and an acceptance of the differences in the immediate social surroundings, the residents of Zagreb have higher levels of bonding both among themselves and with the police. One should take into account that societal values tend to change as the community grows more complex, more heterogeneous and more connected to the world. Societies and individuals thus have reciprocal impacts on value systems.

The personal fear of victimisation is equally represented in both samples. We can partially attribute this fear to the 'culture of fear' and sense of insecurity that is induced into people through the mass media and the current 'culture of violence'. Nowadays, the media represents an important source of information on all the problems that do not represent the everyday experiences of average people. The studies show that the reasons for this skewed perception on crime lie in the way it is presented in the media, because more space is devoted to extreme and atypical crime, mostly crime involving vulnerable victims and non-vulnerable perpetrators, and they are pessimistic about the criminal and legal systems (Dubois, 2002).



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