

DEVELOPING CITIZEN SAFETY

Catalin I. VRABIE
Faculty of Public Administration
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
Bucharest, Romania
cataloi@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Is it possible to involve citizens in the process of increasing public safety? Police used, even from its beginnings, the help of citizens, otherwise they would encounter problems in performing its duty - many of its successes were due to the unification of Police forces with the citizens. How citizens get involved? (1) They may be directly asked by the Police officers (a time consuming method because many police officers needs to go on the field to speak with the potential witnesses) or (2) by using the mass-media channels (television can address to a large number of potential witnesses in a very short time). We still can see on TV portraits of missing persons, or some other kind of images with which the Police is trying to solve some of its cases (thieves, robbers or burglars surprised by surveillance cameras) – why not Internet software application?!*

Keywords: *e-government, software, technology, Internet.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1978 Ostrom said that many state institutions need the cooperation of citizens for their work to be effective. For example in the police case, citizens are the ones who make complaints. Without these, police departments would not be able to catch thieves or to find missing persons. The idea behind is that the people have to contribute in various ways to increase police efficiency. They are no longer regarded as "passive objects", but they are actively involved in increasing public safety. For this the police departments must find appropriate way of engaging citizens, for bringing a positive contribution to this process of increasing public safety. Investing in citizens' involvement can be understood as a responsibility to them.

Cooperation involve either face to face discussion or through the mass-media channels. Face to face contact plays a crucial role in investigations of police departments. This type of interaction is expensive and requires that both, police and citizens, to be in the same place at the same time; and that means that they are able to contact a limited number of persons. The media, on the other hand, is used to inform citizens of the results of police investigations. It has no problem reaching the masses. The disadvantage here is the fact that there are no opportunities for direct interaction.

Next I will refer to new elements of the media (mobile phones, Internet) as sensing new opportunities for cooperation between state institutions (in the example chosen by me – police departments) and citizens.

Police can provide an unlimited amount of data to citizens in a structured manner, and to provide opportunities for interaction. Additionally, information can be provided in real time so that they may be directly involved in police work. This suggests that police should take the opportunities to expand citizen's cooperation through the virtual world.

WHY WOULD THE POLICE BE INTERESTED IN THIS NEW DIMENSION?

On the first place, because these new environments can provide a new way for increasing police efficiency. *How's that?* Well ... by getting relevant information from citizens about the suspects or the victim; information about missing persons; about the stolen goods, etc. Generically, this type of information can be called: information from witnesses. Citizens do not need certain attributes to provide such data; the only requirement is that they must have been in a position where they could observe the relevant issues. Another type of relevant information would be the one provided by the experts. In some circumstances the police would not be able to build a plausible scenario to explain a particular crime. So, police detectives may appeal to citizens and ask them to come up with some ideas or scenarios. They should not have been there, but can provide useful information because they can interpret certain events other than the police. The more information from "witnesses" and from the "experts"; the more accurate the investigation may be; and by that the police can solve the case faster and efficient (Meijer 2010).

A second reason should be to strengthen the legitimacy of the police. Engaging citizens in police work would cause them to increase their confidence and, also reinforces the belief that police are always working (with people) to increase safety. Citizens will more easily understand the efforts made by the police; they will see that the resolution of certain cases in real life is proving much more difficult than on movies. The idea that citizens may help, can make them more confident in the police efforts, and as a result, police legitimacy would be enhanced (Lyon 2001).

1.2 WHY WOULD THE CITIZENS BE INTERESTED IN SUCH COOPERATION?

A first reason is the personal interest of everyone. Citizens, whose house was robbed, are much more willing to help police since they believe that it will catch the perpetrators. They will try to gather data from the neighbors (who probably are not so open in talking with police detectives) and make the script together with the police, etc. In short they are much more motivated by the need to recover their losses (Garland 2001).

Another reason could be based on the one above, only that this time the individual is interested in the interest of the community of which he belongs. Cooperation in this respect seems to benefit the whole community (by the word *community* I refer to a group of people with similar activities) as the individual feels that he contributes to all including his safety. An example could be community taxi drivers, where they, as members, fight against the aggressions to which they face sometimes. Even if the attack was on another

member, everyone reacts as a unit (even if they did not personally know the victim). So ... we may say that they are led by a collective interest (Garland 2001).

A third motive may be the reason to increase citizen participation in public safety (simple as that). Citizens interested in these forms of cooperation considered that their actions produce collective goods. This time it is not an individual interest or group of individuals, but the interests of all members of society. Citizens feel the need to help the police because they believe that in this way they contribute for creating a safer society. Such behavior is influenced not only financial but also by social values like moral norms etc. (Garland 2001).

***This cooperation is based on the premise that there is a win-win situation, but things are not always like this. There are also reasons to believe that citizens do not want to cooperate with police. For example in drugs dealings, members of a neighborhood are pleased, because those activities bring money to their neighborhood, but police want to stop these actions because this is illegal. Here's an example in which there is no desire (as citizen) to get involved in police actions.

Another barrier, this time from the authorities, is the financial factor. Police may blame the wrong information from the population to excuse its failures, and thus explaining certain expenditure may be very difficult (Bovair 2007).

1.3 COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES

Many cities and towns from all around the world offer to the police television channels dedicated to it, through which is trying the engagement of the citizens in trying to resolve certain cases. In other cases, the police set up a Web site to involve more citizens and for the interaction to be more concrete. Some of these sites explicitly put citizens in a detective role, asking them to come with ideas that could be useful or with scenarios that could provide a new perspective of police detectives. Here are also photos or videos with various crimes to which all citizens have access. These materials are useful information that can help in catching them.

***Twitter, Facebook – are social networks which today no longer need advertise. References to them are found in the media, in scientific articles, etc. How do they work? The model is taken from real life. A group of friends who share each other experiences. News is brought by multiple media elements (photos, movies, etc.) with which they can demonstrate the veracity of what was said. In this way, the information posted on each member of the group (its wall) is not visible to non-members of that particular group.

Some applications allow mobile phone use for posting / downloading information / pictures so users can stay "connected" non-stop (migration of users from e (electronic) to m (mobile) is simply a matter of time).

Twitter has taken the model above, but implemented in a totally innovative manner. Each user' page is connected via SMS to his mobile phone. So if a member of one of these virtual communities sends a message on his page (or if a friend from his list does that), that message gets in real-time on the mobile phones (also by SMS - which does not require users to use a smartphone) of the members of his friend list. It should be

noted that there is no cost (except, of course, the one who sends the original message – the price is the standard cost charged for each operator for SMS - the rest is all covered by Twitter) (Osimo 2008).

2. ENGAGING CITIZENS TO INCREASE SECURITY

2.1 HOW CAN POLICE ENJOY THESE SOCIAL NETWORKING MODELS?

Technically the creation of such platforms is not an impediment. Through a proper marketing campaign, it remains just to get people in.

Take the example of a small neighborhood (the dimensions of each collectivity is set by the police according to the demographic density of that particular area – see figure 2). If one of the neighbors sees a robbery at the corner shop or on a car in the parking line, he sends a message to the police wall and that message is automatically sent on the mobile phone of every member of the community. Obviously, in this way even the police are notified.

2.2 WHAT BENEFITS WOULD THIS TYPE OF APPLICATION BRING TO THE POLICE AND COMMUNITY?

A first benefit is to immediately alert the competent bodies, by that they can send the nearest crew to catch the offender. Another benefit would be that community members are suddenly paying attention to what happens outside, and they can provide important data to police investigators (how many people were involved, how they have been dressed, where did they ran or hide, etc..)

Users need not to fear about the eventual identification of the perpetrators of crime, because their personal data will only be known by the police.

These network models of interaction restrict the space needed by criminals and increase the confidence of every member of the police network.

3. HOW IS THIS DONE?

Step 1 - for citizens.

They must register on the city police Web portal, providing the contact details as requests. Based on these data, the police department may easily recognize users when they later interact with it through the web portal.

All these identification info remain confidential. In order to structure the online discussions, it will be used as identifier of each member his user name which is totally his responsibility (maybe with some remarks; like how not to be – first_name.last_name for example).



Figure 1. The registration of citizens as users of the service

Step 2 - for police

Police, on the basis of demographic density, will divide the area in sectors of interaction. It is not necessary that all citizens of that area to be users of the service; over time the system will attract more and more. In this section a special place are those who have a residence in another area but they work here - they should be taken into account as well because they can provide useful information.



Figure 2. Interaction sectors

Step 3

This is the moment when a crime is committed and a community member see what happens as a witness. Simple observation is not enough, he must want to stop such events, and the easiest and correct way is by announcing the authorities.

Step 4 - Interacting with police through the web portal

The user sends an SMS to police web portal (just like on Twitter, there is an unique telephone number assigned to it - a short number), with minimal details about what he observes (e.g. where the action is, what happens, how many participants are, etc.). The portal immediately notifies departments for such situations and then a crew is send to the area to assess / intervene.



Figure 3. Interaction with the Police

At the same time the Web portal send a text message on each registered user describing the situation and requesting additional information from other witnesses who may be nearby (e.g. when a car is robbed neighbors can look out the window and see some clues about the thief / thieves – sending it to the police Web portal via SMS).

Step 5 - Gathering detailed information

A telephone operator from the police, will contact the first witness to request details and answer to the phones from other witnesses (contacted via SMS – see step 4). Thus, the multitude of information (which will be sent in real time to the police crew went to the area) can help in catching the perpetrator or at least to stop crime in progress (a brawl on the street, etc.).



Figure 4 Information flow

Since each user is registered on the site with real data, this information will empower him, thus minimizing the number of situations where police are informed deliberately wrong. Legislation penalizing any misleads.

Participants will receive a message when the action ends, and they can also obtain additional information about that from the website. The Website presents as well information about the final result.

Below I will present a scheme of the whole interaction between the user (after he has made its on-line account), portal, other users and the police.

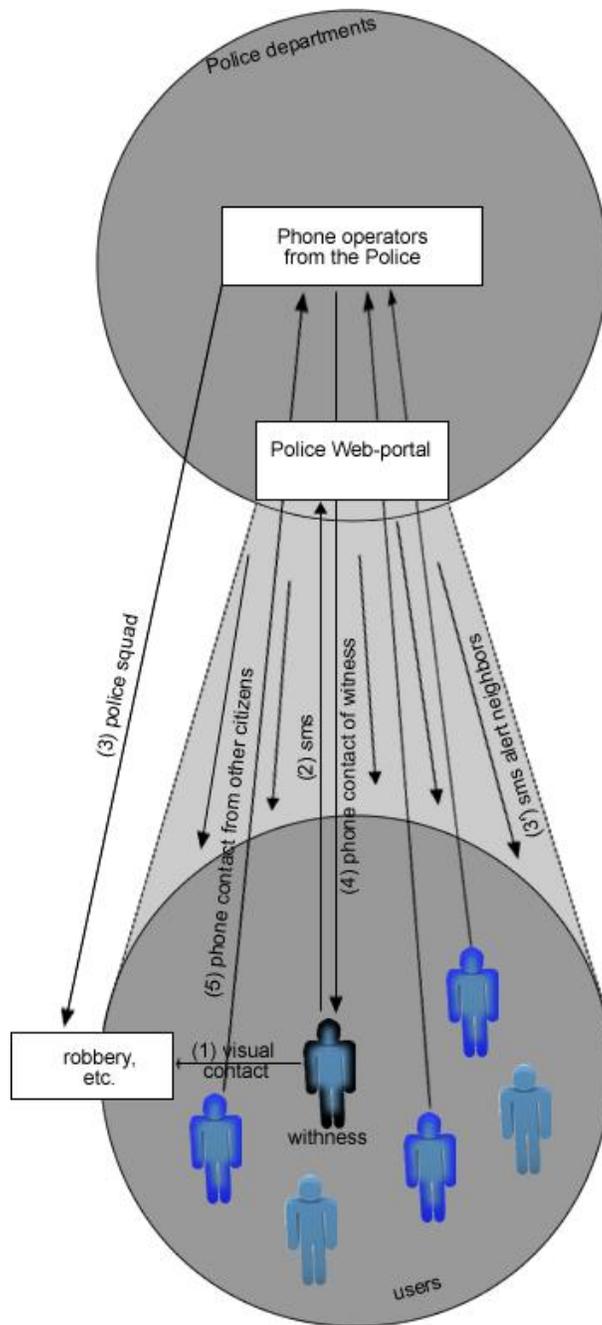


Figure 5. User Interaction - portal - other users - police

4. THE SUCCESS OF THOSE NETWORKS

Such systems are already used in several European countries: Denmark, Netherlands, etc. I will present some elements found in their practice. For example, in the Netherlands, Amsterdam police launched such a service since 2004, boasting a total of 200,000 visits (unique users) in the period December 2006 - June 2008 (approximately 2,000 per week accessing). We can say that is an impressive number for a city with a population of 750,000 inhabitants. This indicates that the site is known to the public.

The number of reactions has been much harder to measure. Amsterdam Police Department indicates that it received approximately 900 responses that were relevant in their investigation in December 2006 - June 2008, leading to about 10 reactions per week. In some cases, most reactions were not present on the site. Although police indicated the presence of a few tens of reactions, but posted on the site just a few - the reasons for this censorship is related to the existing protocols about providing information to citizens, which the police must respect.

The commitment of citizens seems to be linked with attention to the mass-media. Most of these reactions have been posted when the police investigation was presented on TV as well. Chronology of a murder investigation illustrates this impact. Such an investigation has been published on the website of the Amsterdam police on December 4 - 2006, and several national television channels have mentioned this investigation the same day while other channels indulge careful investigation of the website and the next day. If we look at the pattern of visits we see that visits have been 941 on December 4, 26.099 and 12.683 on December 5 and December 6. The number decreases slowly these days at the same level as at the beginning. Number of comments shows the same pattern: four comments on December 4, 1960 on December 6 and 60 on December 7. Then their numbers decreased to the same level as before the media attention.

What is the content of the contribution of citizens to police investigations? Most of the reactions contained information that could be relevant to the investigation. 38% of comments were replies to questions by the police and 41% of the reactions were about the investigation without presenting a clear answer to police questions, the rest is almost irrelevant to the investigation.

Is citizen's information helpful for solving crimes? Quantitative data are not available to clearly answer this question, but data on the site have led to the conclusion that citizens have helped solve some crimes. It remains however unclear what exactly is the contribution of citizens. A positive result would be that some citizens have sent messages of praise for the police to lunch their websites.

It may be notice the negative effects of this initiative, namely the impact of citizen comments on other citizens. Abstruse theories and insults made by other citizens may have a negative effect on the victim's family and friends. The most prominent impact is touching the privacy of suspects. Photos and videos with them are posted on the Internet; these materials can be copied and posted on other Web sites forever.

There are studies showing that 30-35% of tests may be solved based on the information offered by watching television. Clearly we cannot talk about the fact that the

Internet has the same success, but in future this may change. Using Internet can be considered as being additional media. The advantage is that there's no limit to the information that is shown to citizens. For the media there is clearly such a restriction. Another advantage of the Internet is that information is available 24 / 7. While some citizens may have missed the TV program, can always check the Internet. A disadvantage of the Internet is that it is much harder to capture the attention of people.

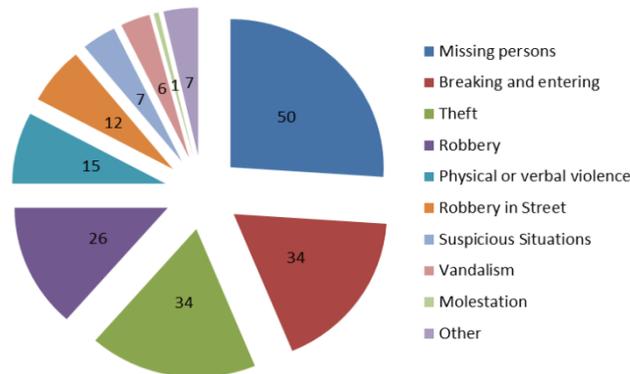
Police must find ways to use their strengths and weaknesses of this variety of media. In this mix of media, the Internet can be important as being additional and can be used to attain a certain target.

An important feature of this technology is that citizens can be finding anywhere and anytime. An important question for this project would be "*Who are the citizens who participate?*" Netherlands Case says the participants are mostly men over 40 years.

The network can be viewed as a form of co-production as the information is combined with information from police and citizens. The website is used to present information but contains little information about its participants. Police deliberately chose to use this technology to facilitate police-citizen interaction not citizens-citizens. In fact, police want to have control.

The graph below shows some data on the website of the Amsterdam police. This data show us the types of incidents in which police considered opportune the cooperation with citizens and how many of them reacted.

Chart 1. Types of incidents



Source: Amsterdam Police web site

5. THE IMPACT / CONCLUSIONS

The coproduction new practices between police and citizens have been developed to work, to be efficient. They were covered quite a bit and it seems to have sparked interest among citizens. Citizens want to participate much more intense in those projects. There is also a risk in this "game". This risk refers to the privacy of citizens.

These new forms of cooperation in police work could be a special status for citizens of the participants; men aged over 36 years than those who are young and immigrants. So ... there may be some complaints among citizens.

But back to the key question: *how can the Internet be used to secure cooperation and what that it means for people in the network?* The most important thing and most important contribution is the creation of new connections.

Police would like to have full control over these new connections. Information is sent from police to citizens and police only respond to citizens. There is an open communication. Citizens are asked to be practically available to police when needed to answer questions. Very important is to find fun and excitement among the citizens. As if we were to turn into a real-life game - to get a message to look out the window and catch the offender.

Citizens can receive messages anytime and anywhere. The distinction between participation and serious game today is very small. The idea of making a game from such cooperation's has important implications. Police will compete with other "games" to attract the attention of citizens.

REFERENCES

1. Bovaird, T. (2007). *Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of services*, Public Administration Review, Vol. 67, No. 5. (October 2007)
2. Osimo D. (2008) *Web 2.0 in Government: Why and How?* <ftp://ftp.jrc.es/pub/EURdoc/EURdoc/JRC45269.pdf>
3. Garland, D. (2001). *The Culture of Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press <http://www.jstor.org/pss/4150534>
4. Lyon, D. (2001). *Surveillance society. Monitoring everyday life*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press. <http://books.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/openup/chapters/0335205461.pdf>
5. Meijer A. (2010). *Cocreating Safety. Using New Media to Engage Citizens in the Production of Safety*. Paper for EGPA conference in 2010
6. Ostrom, Elinor (1978). Citizen Participation and Policing: What Do We Know? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1-2.
7. Police web portals: <http://www.politie.nl/>, <http://www.defensie.nl/english/>