



## Inspiring CitizeNS Participation for Enhanced Community PoliCing AcTions

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Additional information about the project and the consortium can be found at <http://www.INSPEC2T-project.eu>

### DELIVERABLE SUMMARY

#### **D2.1 – Social and cultural aspects of Community Policing**

This deliverable analyses the concept of “community” from a wide array of perspectives, including sociological and ethnological framings, economical and criminological approaches towards it, as well as evolving notions of “virtual” communities and digital forms of representations. It showcases the identified social and cultural dimensions affecting CP initiatives, highlighting the specific attributes and local peculiarities of indicative EU countries, which are considered in the INSPEC<sup>2</sup>T system.

INSPEC<sup>2</sup>T has the objective to establish a shared understanding of security problems and coproducing an atmosphere of mutual trust among all community stakeholders from different backgrounds (including the police). To achieve this objective, it is crucial to consider social and cultural dimensions of CP from the very beginning of the project.

Community policing is spelt out differently in European countries. The idea or philosophy of CP is discussed in police organisations across the European Union, but the implementation displays major differences. Different traditions of police-community relations have developed in these countries over a long time.

To understand the role of modern police and policing in the context of CP it is important to emphasize that police work is primarily demand-driven, i.e. the police is called upon by citizens to provide a service (solve a conflict, intervene in a public place, investigate a crime scene, find a missing person, etc.). Also a large part of requests addressed to police by citizens is not related to crime.

Police in the UK are accountable to their local constituency and this makes a big difference, when compared to continental European police forces. The police administration shows high receptiveness and also new social media are used in many of these projects. Different forms ranging from neighbourhood watch organisations to citizen police officers have been implemented across the UK and provide a wide array of practice examples for community policing approaches. At the same it has to be considered that these cases cannot be used as blueprint to be transposed into other cultures.

In Northern Ireland, though geographically close to the UK, the situation is different due to a history of deep-rooted social and political conflicts along religious lines, reproducing economic cleavages. Communities are divided along these lines and – what is even more relevant in the context of Community Policing – also the police are considered as an institution shaped by religious attitude and prejudice. The network of civil society organisations underpinning and shaping communities is huge in Northern Ireland and covers all dimensions of civic life at community level.

Although police in Spain have a legacy of being considered as an authoritarian state apparatus, similar to Northern Ireland, the Spanish police force seems to have gone quite a long way to reduce this burden of history. Programmes for CP have been implemented in a number of municipalities. They have been evaluated and adapted to local contexts. Crucial issues like ethnic profiling, pointing to the fragmented nature of communities have been – obviously successfully – addressed in several pilot projects. Here one of the salient lessons of CP seems to have been learnt: public safety cannot be reduced to policing strategies but has to be seen as a broad and complex task involving many stakeholders.

In the Netherlands the driving motivations for the introduction of CP are similar to the other countries: getting closer to the needs and demands of the community, better communicate with local stakeholders, improve the capacity for conflict resolution and last but not least, collect intelligence on crime from the citizens. Despite a comparatively long tradition of CP programmes in the Netherlands (30 years) satisfaction of citizens with police performance has declined. In a comparative European perspective, the perceived dissatisfaction is based on a high level of police performance, and community orientation. The standard dimensions of good police community relations have been found in studies about CP in the Netherlands: trust,

visibility, and accountability to name just the key points. Using new social media to keep contacts with local citizens seems to have a positive effect according to studies. This wide variety of approaches also demonstrates the need to tailor a CP programme to the specific needs and idiosyncrasies of the community addressed.

New social media are used in all cases though with different philosophies. What all CP programmes share is an emphasis on improving and strengthening communicative links with the citizens following the idea that good Community Policing entails a substantial element of communications policing. It should be emphasised that introducing CP as an approach of policing and integrating new social media into such an approach always entails substantial changes in police organisation, culture and procedures. Understanding CP as an add-on or technical tool to broaden existing police strategies will fail to meet the ambitious objectives of this approach.

ICT can indeed have a positive contribution to knowledge sharing. However, it has been found that face-to-face interaction is often considered an important addition – members of communities who also interact face-to-face are likely to develop higher levels of trust, identification and (consequently) share more knowledge than those who don't (van den Hooff, 2003).

Commitment and a sense of belonging are important concepts when examining online communities and recently a number of studies have examined the challenges of maintaining active participation among community members and identified key themes in creating and maintaining effective digital communities.

Communality (i.e. the sense of an appearance of a community) appears to be an important effect and factor of ICT use. A shared information base forms the basis for a community: it positively influences both trust and identification in the community (van den Hooff, 2004).

To be effective, web sites and virtual communities must offer something of value—something that makes people want to check back frequently, to offer suggestions, and to take away information that is valuable and that cannot be obtained as easily through alternative means (Baim, 2009).

Research warns that time must be spent in setting up online forums, and there is a direct relationship between the time an online forum has been active and the number of users it has (Preece, 2001).