Enhancing Cooperation Between LEAs and Citizens: The INSPEC²T Approach

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Abstract—Enhancing the feeling of public safety and crime prevention are tasks customarily assigned to the Police. Police departments have, however, recognized that traditional ways of policing methods are becoming obsolete; Community Policing (CP) philosophy; however, when applied appropriately, leads to seamless collaboration between various stakeholders like the Police, NGOs and the general public and provides the opportunity to identify risks, assist in solving problems of crime, disorder, safety and crucially contribute to improving the quality of life for everyone in a community. Social Media, on the other hand, due to its high level of infiltration in modern life, constitutes a powerful mechanism which offers additional and direct communication channels to reach individuals or communities. These channels can be utilized to improve the citizens' perception of the Police and to capture individual and community needs, when their feedback is taken into account by Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in a structured and coordinated manner. This paper presents research conducted under INSPEC²T (Inspiring CitizeNS Participation for Enhanced Community PoliCing AcTions), a project funded by the European Commission's research agenda to bridge the gap between CP as a philosophy and as an organizational strategy, capitalizing on the use of Social Media. The project aims to increase transparency, trust, police accountability, and the role of civil society. It aspires to build strong, trusting relationships between LEAs and the public, supporting two-way, contemporary communication while at the same time respecting anonymity of all affected parties. Results presented herein summarize the outcomes of four online multilingual surveys, focus group interviews, desktop research and interviews with experts in the field of CP practices. The above research activities were conducted in various EU countries aiming to capture requirements of end users from diverse backgrounds (social, cultural, legal and ethical) and determine public expectations regarding CP, community safety and crime prevention.

Keywords—Community partnerships, next generation community policing, public safety, social media.

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I. Introduction

THE academic community has shown interest in the topic of CP for more than 30 years. It is generally accepted that no strong, coherent definition exists in the literature [1]-[7]. A well-defined, well-accepted CP definition is still missing; 'There are advantages to leaving the term within this arena of imprecision, in that by doing so any renamed or add-on program that a police agency wishes to adopt can be introduced under the banner of Community Policing' [8].

CP philosophy is built on the belief that people deserve and have a right "to have a say" in policing in exchange for their participation and support [9]. CP is 'The process of enabling the participation of citizens and communities in policing at their chosen level, ranging from providing information and reassurance, to empowering them to identify and implement solutions to local problems and influence strategic priorities and decisions' [10].

INSPEC²T projects' scope is to develop a sustainable framework for CP that effectively addresses and promotes seamless collaboration between the police and various communities and is based both on an EU crime prevention paradigm and Member States' Specific Internal Security Policies as well the abovementioned communities' needs. The end goal is to validate the research results and best practices on cooperation between police and the society at a local, regional and national level. This concept constitutes the vantage point from where special characteristics, particularities and determinants for trust between all stakeholders are to be identified and analysed.

INSPEC²T is a three-year project that started in May 2015. It focuses on a user-centric design and development approach, and has already mobilized and engaged a critical user group mass, in EU and abroad. With special emphasis on social media, it consolidates and modernizes bidirectional communication of stakeholders, using multi-level anonymity flags and having a clear understanding of acceptability issues. Driven from accommodated transnational and multicultural best practices, it adheres to an approach where social, cultural, legal and ethical dimensions are embedded into core user centric design specifications and implementation procedures.

In the course of the first 10 months of the Project, INSPEC²T focused on the review of the current CP initiatives

and programs implemented throughout the world, with a special interest in EU. Moreover, desktop research recorded the best practices and State of the Art Technologies used. Alongside, several surveys with various stakeholders were designed, conducted and assessed in order to identify the requirements and the specific factors that appear to be significant in CP programs, applied methodologies, tools and training.

The above activities were performed in order to produce a gap analysis of the CP practices and technological associated tools currently in use. This allowed the INSPEC²T partners to elaborate and consolidate the End User Requirements. These aspects are considered of high importance for the project in general, and specifically for the design and development of the technological tools which will interact with and have an impact on end users.

Section II describes the profiles of the respondents who participated in our request for information and the characteristics of the surveys whereas Section III presents the key findings from the analysis conducted.

II. SURVEY CHARACTERISTICS

Review of the research literature served as reference to design the online surveys. Four online surveys in total were conducted, and all of them complied with EU Directive 1995/46/EC for data protection and handling. The surveys aimed at the following CP stakeholders: i) European citizens, ii) Neighborhood watch associations and NGOs/Societal Workers with focus on CP, iii) Police academia, and iv) LEAs assigned with CP tasks. The surveys were conducted from August 2015 to January 2016.

The first survey was launched aiming at users from the 'general public'. Citizens across European countries are considered as potential users of INSPEC²T platform, so it is imperative to capture their needs and wants and understand the reasons behind them. A second survey was aimed at NGOs, community workers, city administrators and other actors who either professionally or on a voluntary basis are involved with security and safety in communities. The participants were asked to provide their experiences about CP and the use of Social Media. The third and fourth survey sought to capture the views of police colleges / universities / academies involved in the training of police students, and active CP practitioners from EU member states. The responses received were 1092 for the first survey, 70 for the second, while 19 Police professors from 6 countries responded to the 3rd survey. The 4th survey received 782 responses from 8 EU member states.

In the general public survey approximately 6 out of every 10 citizens who took part in the study were males. More specifically, 57.56% of the responders were male, while 42.44% were females. Regarding their origin, citizens were mainly from Greece (41.76%) and the United Kingdom (30.86%). Spain (9.71%), the Netherlands (7.97%) and Germany (6.04%). Only 3.66% were from other European countries. With respect to their education, most participants (82.45%), have a college or university degree. Lastly, the majority (80.9%) of the responders are employed.

Regarding the NGOs / community workers, 58.6% of the respondents are males. 78.5% of the sample are aged between 30 and 59 years old. 18.6% are older than 59, while only 2.9% of the respondents are between 20-29 years of age.

In the survey featuring police universities and academies which are involved with the CP training curriculum of LEAs, 57.9% of the academics were from Greece, 21.1% from Germany, and 5.3% of participants were from Spain, 5.3% from The Netherlands, 5.3% from UK and 5.3% from US.

Lastly, in the survey addressed to active CP practitioners more males than females engaged with the questionnaire. Only in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom more than 30% (32% and 39%) of the respondents were female police officers. Moreover, two thirds of police respondents are working in communities with more than 20.000 inhabitants (66,8%). Only one tenth of participants work in smaller communities with one to five thousand citizens (10,1%). The police respondents were also asked about their age. While in Greece the majority of the respondents are between 20 to 29 years of age, a majority of participants from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands are between 50 and 59 years old. In Spain and the UK most answers come from middle-aged officers (40 to 49 years of age), while only in Northern Ireland and in Cyprus a majority is between 30 and 39 years of age.

All surveys were published online and disseminated via Social Media. Respondents were mainly from England, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Greece and Cyprus. Countries with mature CP programs (e.g. England, Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Spain), and countries where CP schemes are not so widely engulfed in the broader Police strategic planning (e.g. Greece, Cyprus) contributed.

Further to the online surveys, focus group discussions and interviews were also conducted. These physical sessions were divided in two phases to assist researchers capture experience, lessons learned, best practices and also record suggestions. The focus group discussions took place in Greece, UK, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Spain. The participants were selected from two distinct groups. 1) The "official" CP practitioners which are LEAs assigned with CP tasks and received appropriate training and 2) the General Public, consisting of citizens with diverse backgrounds who may or may have not been accustomed to CP terms and applications.

The first phase was dedicated to LEAs. People in groups of ten from Greece, Cyprus, Spain, England and the Netherlands (in total 50 participants) of various ages and diverse CP background were interviewed anonymously in group sessions. The second phase concluded with 50 citizens, again of various ages and different social economic backgrounds being interviewed in groups. Interviewees with different employment status, profession, and various education qualifications provided their personal views about a list of CP topics and indicated fields where existing CP programs should improve. All participants were given a consent form for their participation to sign in advance.

In addition to the online surveys and the focus groups, INSPEC²T utilised a Stakeholder Advisory Group committee (SAG). This committee is made up of LEAs (at national and

EU level), government organisations, active citizen groups, community organizations, commercial associations, and CP visioners. There are in total 21 members, representing 7 different EU countries and 2 countries from the US continent. Specifically, 14 members are from European countries while 4 of the SAG members are based overseas (Brazil and USA). 13 members were male (62%) and 8 were female (38%). The well experienced CP committee members participated in a workshop and discussed with researchers the findings of the online surveys and the focus groups interviews. Furthermore, they conveyed their professional view on certain CP topics via a questionnaire and they shared their vision for the Next Generation CP (NGCP) roadmap.

III. SURVEY FINDINGS

As stated in the survey demographics section, 2084 responders answered a series of selected questions about CP.

The questionnaires were constructed in such a way that all various stakeholders contributed their views about current CP programs, their preferences for contacting the police and their perception of safety and security in their communities. They were asked to anticipate whether the use of Social Media in certain aspects of a CP program will alter the CP delivery process and how the technological advancements might impact the "modus operandi" with regard to citizens reaching the police and the police responding back.

A. Current Status

At first, we present questions that depict the present situation. In the general public survey, participants were asked to indicate their level of trust in the police. The overall impression as illustrated in Fig. 1, indicates significant gaps in current policing activities as these are assessed by the participants.
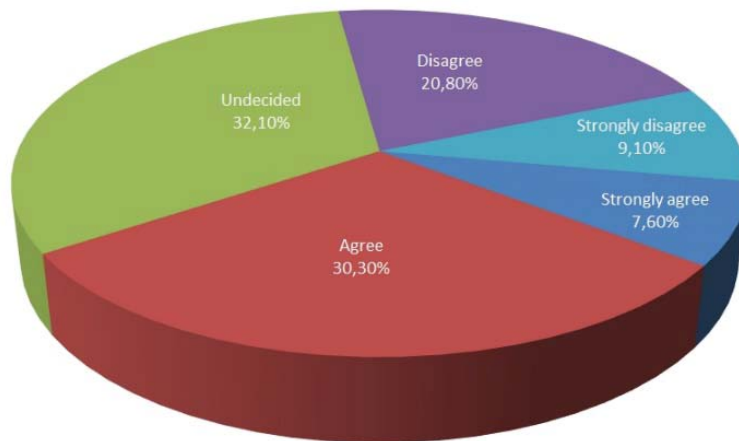

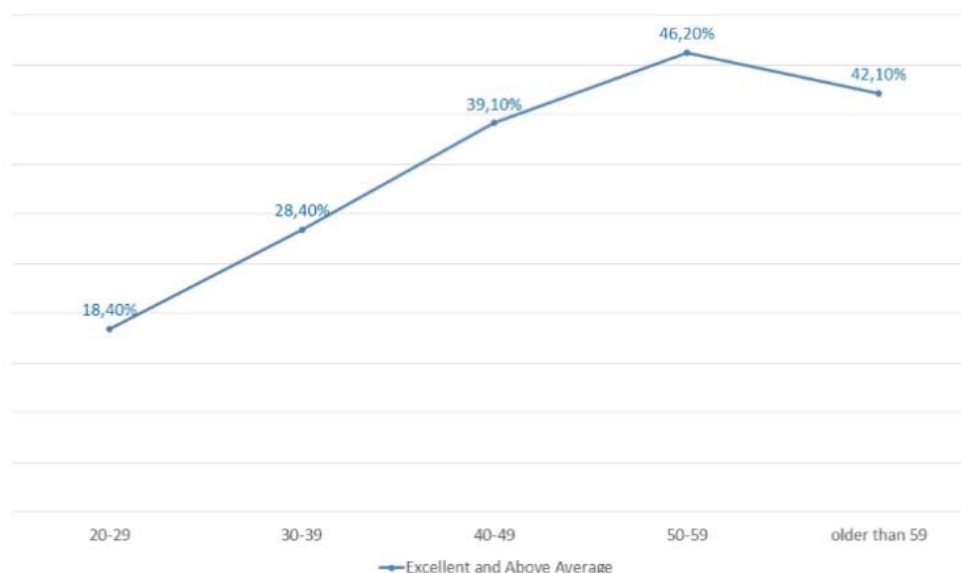Fig. 1 Overall trust in current policing methods

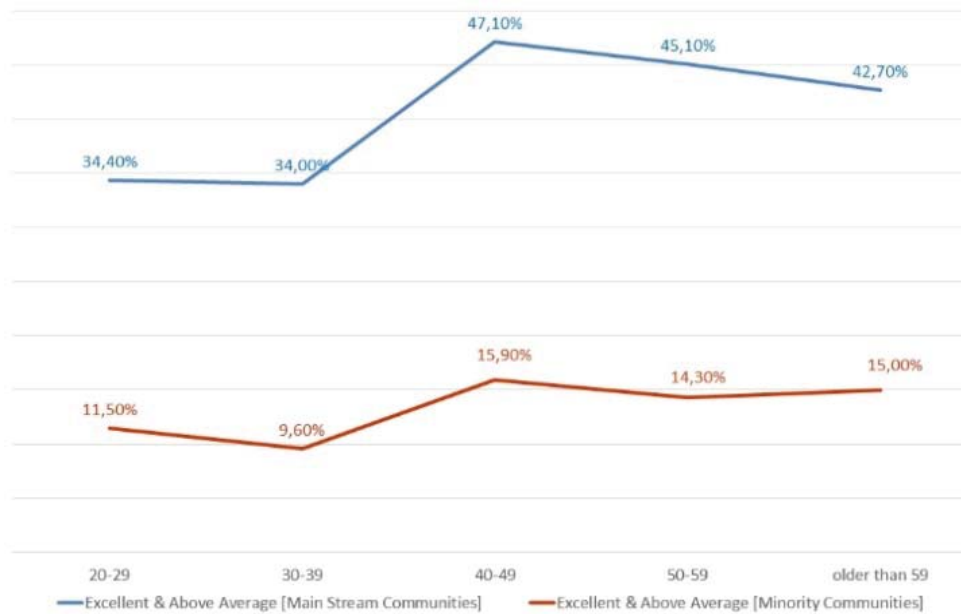Fig. 2 Citizens trust in the police (per age group)

Fig. 3 Citizens trust in the police (mainstream vs. minority communities)

Only a small percentage of 37,9% of the stakeholders seem to be in agreement with the effectiveness of the current policing paradigm in addressing their needs.

To further investigate the parameters that come into play with regard to trust, different age and community groups were considered. Different ages expressed different levels of trust towards the police and what is noteworthy are the opposite trends of trust in the police between mainstream and minority communities.

Responders show more trust to police as they are ageing. Fig. 2 validates the perception that younger aged individuals have less trust in the police and are less committed to CP. Citizens aged below 39 years are less confident towards police operations.

Further to the age factor, other differentiations stem from the type of community the responders reside in. Minority communities tend to trust the police below average, regardless of their age. Numbers range from a min of 9.6% to a max of 15.9% (refer to Fig. 3). When it comes to a positive characterization of their trust in the police, most responders from minority communities have a 'below average' trust in police and the numbers do not seem to get significantly lower as their age increases and are varying from 53.8% to 65.7%. On the contrary, in mainstream communities, 34.4% of ages between 20 and 29 show trust above average in police and as ages rise, the level of trust in police rises also. Ages between 40 and 49 years old demonstrate maximum trust in police, with a number of 47.1%. In accordance to this, as people get older (in main stream communities), their negative depiction of their trust towards the police ('below expectations' and 'very low') also drops.

The responders were asked to identify the CP stakeholders, that is, people who are present within their neighbors and have an interest in other peoples' safety and are concerned about the security overall.

Fig. 4 presents the groups that CP programs should interact with. INSPEC²T, or other related projects, should provide tools and methodologies to boost interaction with these groups.

Another topic of interest is the citizens' preferred method for contacting the police.

Currently, the communication amongst citizens (either for personal or professional reasons) is digitized (Fig. 5). Email is widely used and exceeds phone communication. On the contrary, regarding citizen police communication, citizens are communicating with the police using legacy phone communications. Approximately one fourth of citizens only (26.9%) use Social Media and email (24%) to contact the police.

The reasons for citizens contacting the police are primarily for requesting information (19.8%) and call for assistance (18.95%). Citizens at a less frequent rate are reporting traffic accidents (6.4%), or visit the police station to report an incident (8%). Only 4.8% get in contact because they were attacked or have directly experienced some criminal activity. It is important to take into consideration the fact that only 10% of communication with the police nowadays occurs via Social Media, whereas 95.7% of those surveyed have searched the web in the previous year, seeking information about their neighbourhood, district or city.

Responders were asked if they are using Social Media to communicate in general with their network, and whether they will consider the idea in the future to use Social Media to get in touch with the police.

Despite the fact that the younger ages (below 40 years) are frequent users of the Social Media (surveys showed numbers over 80%), young people would prefer to contact the police through Social Media at a rate only slightly above 50% (Fig.
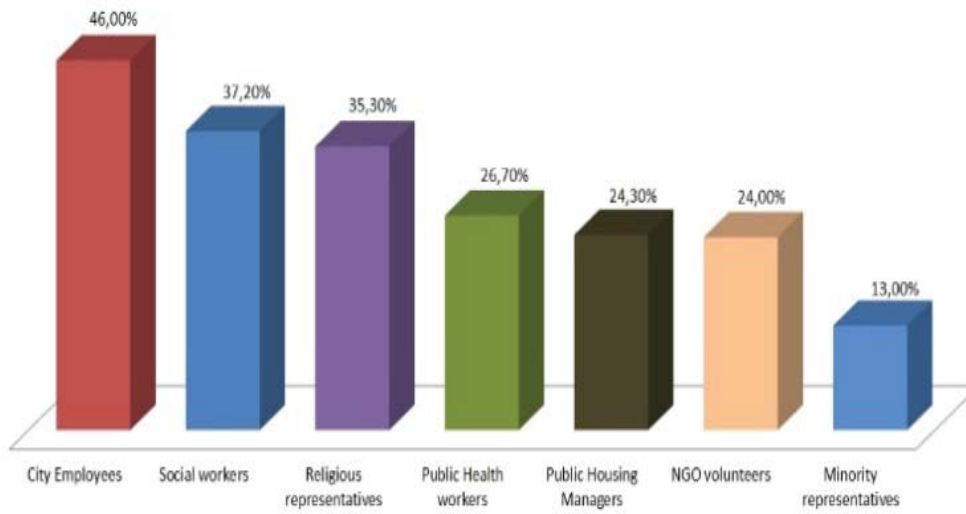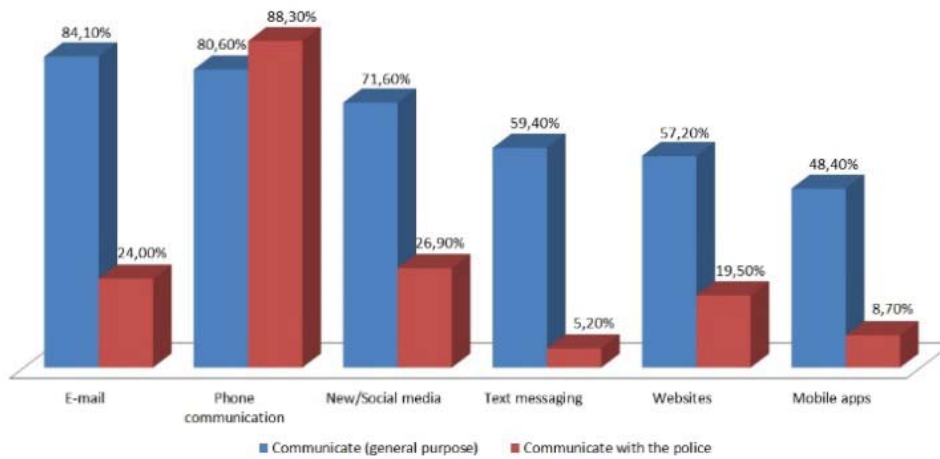
6).

Fig. 4 CP stakeholders

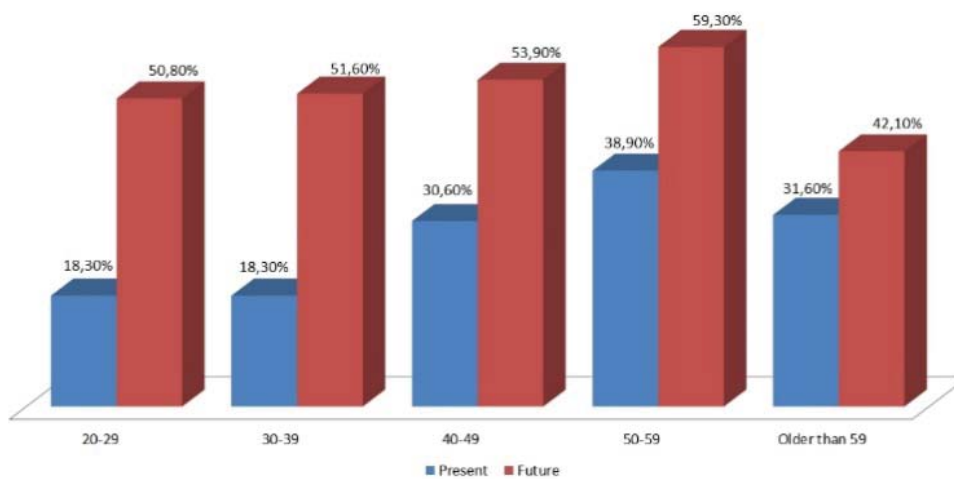Fig. 5 Communication methods used

Fig. 6 Use of Social Media to communicate with the police

B. Preferred Status

This subsection presents the views of the responders for the future.

Citizens indicated a strong preference to engage with the police using Social Media and modern communications means like email, mobile applications and websites as seen in Fig. 6. Communication preference via the telephone although it decreases by 27.1%, (Fig. 7) it is still remains the most favorable choice at 61.2%, followed by email 60,5%, Social Media at 51.5% and mobile applications and portals with 46.7% and 45.3% respectively.

Following the general public response about their preference to communicate with the police using modern technologies, the impact of Social Media was studied in detail with a series of questions like: - Proactively address crime root causes in the community, - Improve the quality of life for everyone in the community, - Stimulate citizens own responsibilities in cooperating with the police, - Improve legitimacy of police operations within communities, - Build better relationships and trust between police and the community as a whole and - Improve the image of the police in the community and many more as seen in Fig. 8.

Fig. 8 displays the current use of Social Media in CP related incidents with the blue bars. Citizens were also asked to provide their estimations about the future impact of Social Media in CP activities. Their perception is indicated with the red bar. Approximately more than three out of four citizens believe that modernizing the ways the public communicates with the police will proactively address crime root causes in the community, will improve the quality of life, it will stimulate citizens' own responsibilities in cooperating with the police, and it will improve legitimacy of police operations within the community. Similarly, 75.10% to 87.90% of citizens foresees that use of Social Media will add a transparency component in police operations which will improve police legitimacy and will address more efficiently the need for a secure environment. Moreover, the addition of mobile applications, public portals and the overall transformation to a more Social Media environment type, will affect positively the crime reporting, will help LEAs to get into contact with certain community groups which are hard to access and overall will reduce the fear of crime within the community. Likewise, such communication will eventually help build better relationships and trust between police and the community as a whole, will improve the crime prevention operations, and enhance the quality of communication between police and citizens resulting to elevated police reaction for on-going non-violent crime and its subsequent investigation.

The citizens' trust in Police as depicted in Fig. 1 is validated for all the responses shown in Fig. 8. The responses to questions whether a Social Media communication interface will proactively address crime root causes and will improve the quality for everyone in the community that received more positive replies, is in line with the responder age.

The findings in Figs. 9 and 10 are in line with [10] which contains important aspects: Social media are 'meaningful in the context of other kinds of relations between police and public' of which CP figures as a 'prominent model… as a bilateral relation of information sharing' which also makes police 'visible to the public' (ibid., 534). With such relations in existence, future technologies should accomplish a gatekeeper function to perceptibly improve the cooperation between police and public. Correspondingly, the responses received from the NGOs, social workers and other CP activists, including the responses from Police practitioners are in line with the general public's view regarding the exploitation of Social Media as a communication interface with the police and its positive impacts in all the listed CP topics. However, the analysis of certain responses received highlights the following barriers shown in Fig. 11 which are considered crucial factors for implementing a successful CP program capable of addressing the general public concerns.
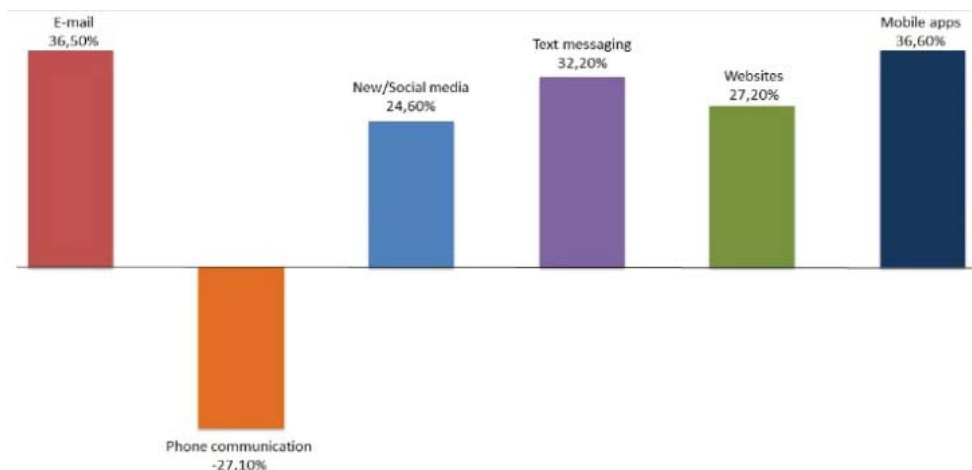

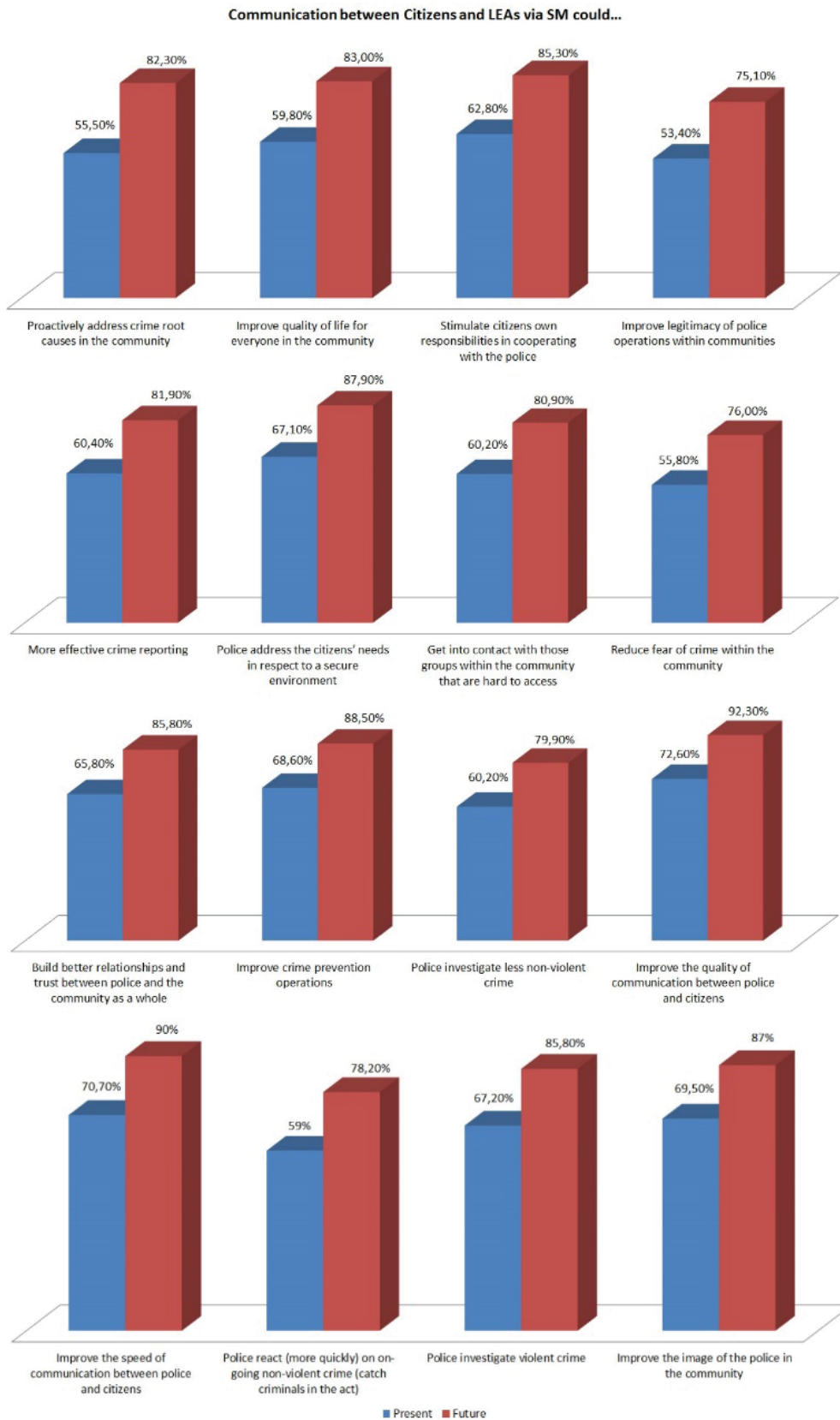Fig. 7 Future communication means for contacting the police

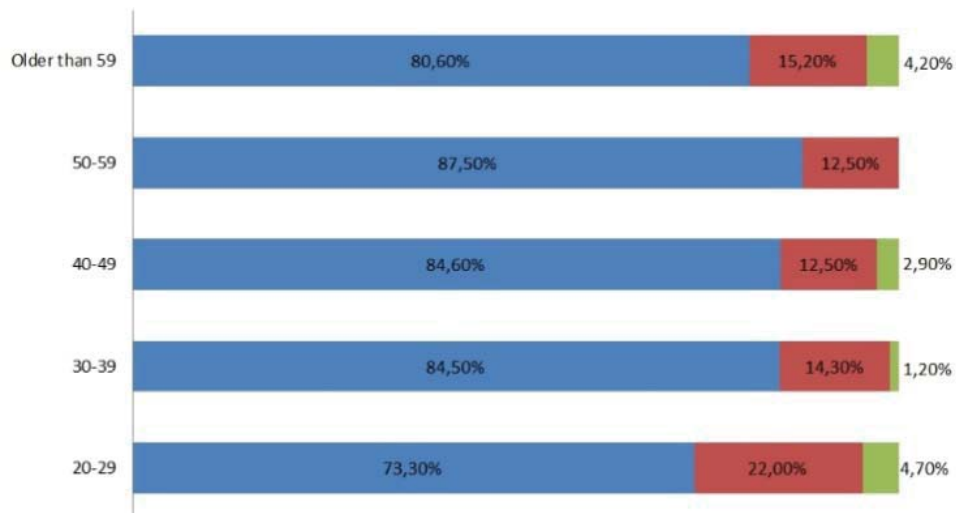Fig. 8 Impact from Social Media to CP related operations

Fig. 9 Foreseen impacts from Social Media to crime root causes

■ Has positive effect [Future] ■ Has no effect [Future] ■ Has negative effect [Future]
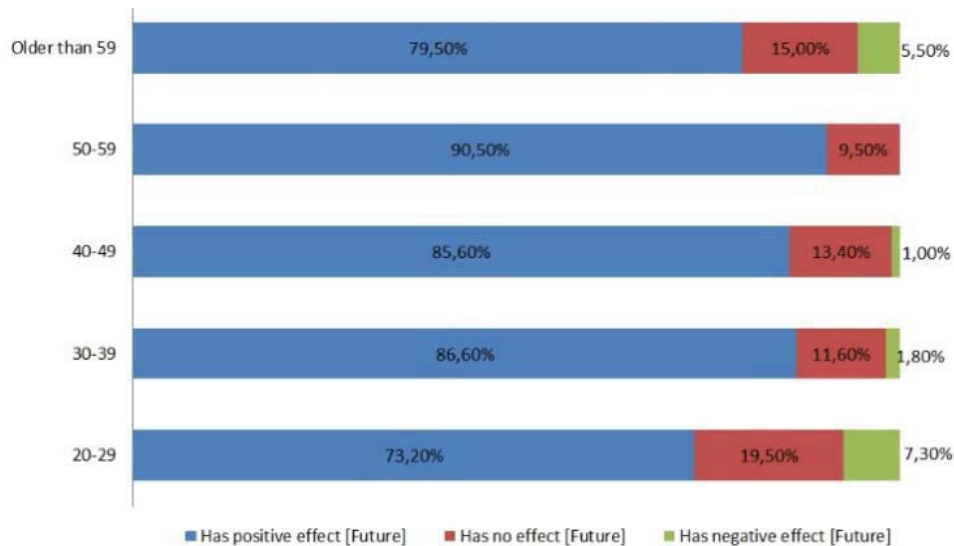
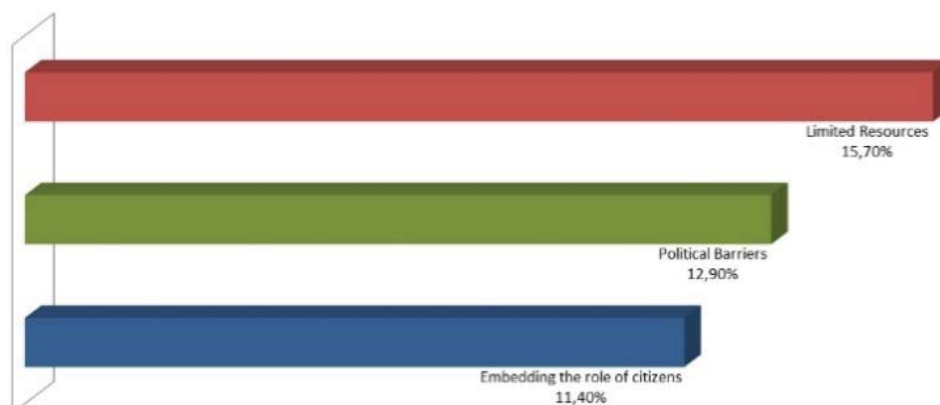Fig. 10 Foreseen impacts from Social Media quality of life

Fig. 11 Top 3 important barriers for implementing a successful CP program

The feedback received from CP practitioners actively involved in CP programs in their areas, shows that an application of a CP program should deal with the following issues: i) the resources allocated to a CP program, ii) any possible political decisions that might affect CP, iii) the role of citizens and how they should interact with the police (Fig. 11). Furthermore, the focus groups revealed that quite often the citizens have not a clear view how CP complements and interacts with "actual" police work.

A CP program based on Social Media is an opportunity to improve the relationship between the general public and the police. The majority of responses submitted from LEAs are consistent with this statement, while only 10% (strongly) disagree. The NGO/community workers also replied positively in this topic (strongly agree: 60.44%; agree: 37.52%; undecided: 2.04%).

To complement the above findings, stakeholder priorities were looked into with regard to what would constitute an effective and appropriate CP program. To this end, a questionnaire of suggested inclusions to a CP solution were put to the participants in order to elicit the strength of their agreement to such suggestions, presented below.

TABLE I
THE IDEAL CP PLATFORM SOLUTION SHOULD…

Suggestion	Mean agreement strength (2=strong agreement, 0=indifference)
…respect legal rights for privacy and anonymity	1.72
… capitalize on the use of social media to enhance the awareness of CP activities	1.61
… lead to more frequent and efficient communication between the communities and the LEAs	1.56
… include a mobile application that will stimulate better community engagement	1.56
… improve public perception of police in the community	1

The top five most highly prioritized features of a CP platform according to the stakeholders were: the right for privacy and anonymity, the use of social media, improved communication with the LEAs, a mobile application interface and a focus on improving the public perception of the police.

IV. THE INSPEC²T APPROACH TO ENHANCE LEA AND COMMUNITY COOPERATION

Nowadays, the rise of virtual communities and 'horizontal' online social networks have complicated the relationships with police who are organised geographically and hierarchically. Against the background of cultural and ethnic diversity the spread of new technologies injects an element of homogeneity and seemingly a level playing field. Therefore, the implementation of social media components should be exploited by the police to interact with all members of a community.

Differences have to be taken into account with regard to language, technology, relations between the citizenry and the police as well as cultural understandings of crime, police, law and order. As surveys pointed, a modernised CP approach shall embrace the use of a fully functional mobile social media interactive system. The new SM system should enable direct communication and collaboration with community members in real time.

Police departments will use such a system to disseminate information to the public, as well as to obtain information, especially for tactical purposes, such as gathering information about threats of mob violence, riots, or isolated criminal activity during otherwise-lawful mass demonstrations. Citizens, on the other hand, may be informed in real time about any incident in their neighbourhood, as well as report or give information back that may be of any use for their local police department by a simple post, comment, photo, or video (captured by mobile smart devices). The whole concept builds on the bidirectional information flow, so as to promote participation, motivation and engagement of citizens and empower them to assist in their own public safety and security. Of course, performing such operations in SM, extends existing policing practices. As with the existing practices, all police operations take place in an environment that is highly regulated and follows the ethics and legislations. The framework that defines the relation of NGCP operations with regulations of public media platforms must be set and utilised. Therefore, the development of the INSPEC²T (or any other similar) system has to ensure that all applications and usage of the system is compliant with the related legislation in force.

Linking the technological and the societal concept is a major challenge addressed in this project. In order to provide for a close cooperation between technology partners and End Users. A multi-dimensional and comprehensive framework for the analysis of community needs will be produced and, at the same time, the intervention points for technological solutions will be identified in the context of virtual policing activities.

Societal partners, additionally, will be involved in co-designing and assessing the technologies throughout the development and implementation process. Starting from the assumption that communication between citizens and police is the key to a successful CP approach, the different demands, needs, and obstacles for such a communicative exchange will be analyzed extensively. On the other hand, the information produced through social media has to be processed in real time to produce the kind of knowledge police and citizens can use to increase a community's collective feelings of security. This has to go beyond the simple idea of enrolling citizens as sources of information for the police. Establishing a shared understanding of security problems and coproducing an atmosphere of mutual trust among all community stakeholders from different backgrounds (including the police) will make the INSPEC²T project stand out from other approaches to the use of social media in a narrow crime-fighting context.

V. CONCLUSION

In order to promote the collaboration between citizens and the police, the perception of public opinion about the current policing methods and procedures should be captured and analysed. This paper presents the findings of pan European

surveys, focus groups discussions, and a mediation workshop with an independent external committee to capture the present state and get a grasp of the upcoming challenges in the foreseeable future.

The gathered and analyzed feedback from various sources (citizens, active community groups, LEAs, police instructors, and CP experts across Europe) sheds some light on which path the CP programs of tomorrow should follow.

The vast majority of the participants in the online surveys, the focus group interviews, and the relevant workshop, overwhelmingly agreed that 1) a NGCP solution should capitalize on the use of Social Media to enhance the awareness of CP activities, and 2) the use of such a solution should lead to more frequent and efficient communication between communities and the LEAs. Additionally, any relevant solution should also improve the public perception of police in the community and improve citizens' feeling of participating in the shaping their community.

Special focus should be given to CP awareness raising activities for both police and citizens. The above activities and associated results, will provide a solid foundation for the evolution of the NGCP roadmap in Europe.

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