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The Significance of Law Enforcement History Research in the Development of Law Enforcement Science

Introductory thoughts

Domestic traditions in law enforcement science played a significant role in the accreditation process. Although at different times in the legal histories and scientific developments of individual states, the independence of law enforcement science emerged in most places. Following the establishment of modern policing, the need for policing science has been a constant topic of discussion in Western Europe and Hungary. Historically, scientific journals on policing have been available since 1869, and civil organisations dedicated to law enforcement were established shortly after. At the same time, policing has been taught in higher education for more than 150 years. These antecedents formed the basis for Academician András Szabó's speech at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2003, delivered at the 9th class meeting. The academician supported his application for a doctoral program in law enforcement with 13 well-reasoned, scientifically rigorous points under the title "*A Place for Law Enforcement Studies*."¹ The next milestone was the accreditation of law enforcement science in 2012. Practitioners of law enforcement science, from Ágoston Karvasy to Géza Finszter, have done a great deal to raise awareness of the field and promote its acceptance within the scientific community.

¹ Sallai, J.: A rendészettudomány megalapítása és akkreditációja Magyarországon [The Establishment and Accreditation of Law Enforcement Science in Hungary]. RTT. Budapest, 2021. 114. o.

A frequently repeated negative claim among law enforcement practitioners is that the organisation has no memory. In addition to advancing science, research into the history of law enforcement aims to refute this claim once and for all.

The dilemmas of police history research

Looking back on the last 100 years of Hungarian police history, we can see three quite different police models. Despite the relative efficiency of the police and gendarmerie under the Horthy regime, it is clear that such a system could not function in a modern democratic state. The same can be said of the unified police force reorganised after 1945, which operated in Hungary during the socialist regime and the period of one-party rule. The police force, which underwent a system change in 1990, sought to move away from the model that embodied its former repressive function towards a service-oriented approach. During the regime change, the theory and history of law enforcement, which had been taboo for nearly forty years, gained momentum, as did research and publication on the concept of law enforcement in professional circles. Géza Katona, Géza Finszter, and István Szikinger played a significant role in this at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.² The legal environment is evolving in the same way, and studying it is also part of research into the history of law enforcement. Looking at the regulation of various police activities in chronological order, we can make several interesting observations. The dilemma comes up when law enforcement, as part of the executive power, becomes a tool for enforcing morally unacceptable political goals. We can think of examples like the persecution of people involved in the illegal communist movement between the two world wars or the Hungarian phase of the Holocaust. We could continue the list with the “attic sweeps” or the reprisals after 1956, and researchers will eventually begin to explore police activities in 2006 as well. It is also the task of researchers to present the negative

² Ibid., 26. o.

aspects, as this is the only way to obtain an objective overview of the period under examination. From the perspective of law enforcement theory, it can be stated as a fact that the qualitative transformation of law enforcement in the founding countries of the EU could only begin after the constitutional consolidation of democratic institutions. For historical reasons, Hungary not only missed out on this process before 1990 but also lost the virtues of the rule of law it had enjoyed before 1945, especially before the First World War. Since 1949, Hungary has had a centralised, military-based state police model separate from the civil administration. This was enshrined in the 1989 amendment to the republican constitution, followed by the adoption of the Police Act in 1994. Hungary's Fundamental Law did not change this model either,³ so here too we find an interesting point of intersection regarding continuity.

History of law enforcement and organisational culture

The constant interruption of continuity mentioned in the introductory remarks led successive law enforcement systems not to consider their predecessors as legal predecessors and, in many cases, to reject them outright. One of the most important tasks of contemporary law enforcement science is therefore to identify those junctures in organisational and legal development which, despite the negative influences of political systems, can serve as building blocks for the historical part of law enforcement science. To explore and systematise these, it is essential to promote research into the history of policing and to publish the results as widely as possible. Let us take a look at what these cornerstones and intersections might be, which could serve as a starting point for today's researchers in the history of policing.

³ Finszter, G.: A rendészet elmélete [Theory of Law Enforcement]. National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement. Budapest, 2014. 58. o.

First, we can highlight the Police Museum's collection and the decades of effort that have gone into creating a vivid presentation of law enforcement history. Several decades amount to more than a century, since the museum began collecting and organising artefacts in 1908. According to the founding legislation: *"Any object confiscated by a judicial or administrative authority, if found suitable for further education in criminal law, or if it appears to shed light on new methods of committing crimes, shall be sent to the Crime Museum organised by the Chief of Police of the Royal Hungarian State Police in Budapest."*⁴ Unfortunately, the ever-expanding collection was almost destroyed during the siege of Budapest in 1945, but in 1958, the collection and systematic display of artefacts began again. In 1963, the Crime Museum was established in a new location (1087 Budapest, Mosonyi u. 9. – former prison), in the building that now houses the Institute of Forensic Sciences and Research. It received its operating license in 1967 as a national museum. The museum operated in this building until 1997, when it was "closed," meaning that only a specific group of visitors (police officers, police academy students, volunteer police officers, law students, medical students, etc.) were allowed to view it. The "closed" nature of the museum was determined by the character of its collection and the building's protected status. In August 1997, the Crime Museum closed its doors, and on April 26, 1999, it reopened in a new location, with a new name and renewed content, now known as the Police Museum, at 5 Mosonyi Street. From that date onwards, the museum's entire exhibition material became publicly available, meaning anyone can view it. The crime museum is one of the most visible guardians of law enforcement traditions. The crime museum plays a role in criminal science and law enforcement similar to that of illustrations in a book or a laboratory in chemistry.⁵ The museum also plays a significant role in the training of students at law enforcement

⁴ The Crime Museum was established on the basis of Ministerial Decree No. 20001/1908. 20001/1908. sz. miniszteri rendelet [Ministerial Decree No. 20001/1908]

⁵ Sallai, J.: A rendészettudomány megalapítása és akkreditációja Magyarországon [The Establishment and Accreditation of Law Enforcement Science in Hungary]. RTT. Budapest, 2021. 100. o.

educational institutions. Still, it also provides new knowledge to law enforcement professionals who have served for decades, and, last but not least, it has the important task of creating, maintaining, and nurturing the organisational culture of law enforcement.

Another important area of research in law enforcement history today is the exploration of law enforcement education and the history of educational institutions. Researchers can discover interesting parallels between the general state of society and the quality of law enforcement education. Is it true that every society has the police force it deserves? Is there a correlation between the level of education in a society and the standard of police training? What should we teach police officers and for how long? Over the past 150 years, many different solutions have been developed for police training in our country, and the process is far from over. The task of law enforcement history research is to find, systematise, and present the good and perhaps forgotten approaches. The founding of the Police Academy in 1970 was, of course, a milestone in its development. From the beginning, high standards were set for law enforcement training and education. After the nationalisation of the police force, the Ministry of the Interior and police leaders recognised that only high-quality courses could adequately prepare police officers and detectives for their duties. The quality of law enforcement training declined after World War II, but in the 1970s, the training provided at the Police Academy was raised to a college level, putting it back on the right track.⁶ The launch of college-level training was the first step towards integrating law enforcement into the higher education system. Without completing law school, or instead of or in addition to it, it provides society with educated, well-trained police officers with the appropriate theoretical knowledge. Today, we know that establishing the RTF was a good, forward-looking decision for several reasons. On the one hand, it served officer training excellently, providing college graduates with the necessary professional and theoretical background, and on the other hand, it became

⁶ Ibid., 104. o.

capable of training young civilians from civilian life to become well-prepared police officers, border guards, correctional officers, and finance officers. Its success and popularity are also evidenced by the fact that, even after the change of regime, applicants could be admitted only after significant oversubscription. After graduation, they had the opportunity to study law at university without an entrance exam during a shortened training period, which many took advantage of.

After 42 years of existence, the Faculty of Law Enforcement Sciences of the National University of Public Service was established as the legal successor to the college, raising the level of education even higher. Following the establishment of law enforcement science, the Doctoral School of Law Enforcement Science was founded, which, through its research and training, is capable of educating and retaining true law enforcement intellectuals. As a precedent, it is important to note that the special relationship between military science and law enforcement science stems from the fact that military science was classified much earlier by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' IX. Department, which is why, for years, doctoral schools of military science became the recipients of scientific theses on law enforcement topics.⁷ In the future, the Doctoral School of Law Enforcement may also provide a forum for this research into the history of education, where the educational activities and their background in each historical period can be studied.

Current trends and methods in law enforcement history research

The great challenge of law enforcement methodology is to find methods that reveal the defining, constant laws governing the functioning of organisations and the knowledge, thinking, and actions of leaders and subordinates that significantly influence the performance of law enforcement

⁷ Hautzinger, Z.: A rendészet határtudományai [The border sciences of law enforcement]. Hungarian Law Enforcement Issue 2020/3. 142. o.

agencies.⁸ Regarding methods, it is important to note that neither law enforcement science nor law enforcement history research can do without interviews and questionnaire-based research techniques. Today, interviews are particularly important in research on law enforcement under socialism. The leaders and staff who served before 1989 can be interviewed for the last time in the next few years, as 36 years after the change of regime, many of them are now in their advanced years. In the mid-2000s, Miklós Tátrai, former secretary general of the National Police Headquarters, published two excellent collections of interviews with national police chiefs who had been in office since 1977, and later with county police chiefs who had won their positions through competitive selection. Unfortunately, even then, the volume could not be complete, as Chief Commissioner László Forgács was no longer among the living.⁹ In the first work, we can read, among other things, about the exact circumstances of how the first national chief commissioner became a police officer. In the interview volume, Károly Ladvászky confesses his personal motivations: *"I joined them and stayed there because I was outraged by the abuse of the defenceless and vulnerable, the violent seizure of others' property, and all acts that violated my sense of justice."*¹⁰ The young volunteer police officer was later dismissed due to his age (he was under 18), but at his own request, he was ultimately allowed to remain with the organisation. Personal accounts such as these can only be uncovered through interviews, which is why they are particularly important and cannot be replaced by any other means.

The three and a half decades that have passed since the change of regime now provide an opportunity for an unbiased assessment of the period. During the research on the history of the organisation conducted at the Doc-

⁸ Finszter, G.: A rendészet elmélete [Theory of Law Enforcement]. National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement. Budapest, 2014. 60. o.

⁹ Tátrai, M.: A rendszerváltás kapitányai [The Captains of the System Change]. Magyar Közlöny Lap- és Könyvkiadó. Budapest, 2010. 126. o.

¹⁰ Tátrai, M.: Szent György védelmében [In Defense of Saint George]. Duna Palota Kulturális Kht. Budapest, 2007. 13. o.

toral School of Law Enforcement Sciences, these recorded life story interviews can provide a wealth of material for future scholars. The use of questionnaire-based research is less common in law enforcement history research, but it can still provide valuable insights into organisational culture. How well do staff members know the history and symbols of their own organisation? Do they remember their great predecessors and cherish their own traditions? Are there any small exhibitions, memorial rooms, or collections? These questions can be interesting topics for investigation, even at a police station or border guard office.

Another possibility is to link historical police research to specific crimes committed decades ago. The analysis of investigative documents found in archives can provide relevant information not only for investigative work but also for the organisation's functioning. In addition to the above data, individual reports, decisions, indictments, and court judgments may also contain a wealth of information of interest to sociologists. The rapid, professional, and effective investigation of crimes can also be considered a common positive aspect of the police forces of all previous systems. Not to mention that we can also draw on criminal procedure law and criminalistics, among the criminal sciences, to support law enforcement science. The added value of these two sciences to policing science lies in the fact that their results are used in law enforcement practice. Their research focuses on current phenomena in the interest of public order and public safety, and their theoretical work deviates only to a limited extent from practice.¹¹ It is therefore worthwhile to conduct research into the history of policing from the perspective of crime, i.e., using long-closed criminal case files that have been forgotten and conducting archival research.

¹¹ Zoltán Hautzinger: The border sciences of law enforcement. Hungarian Law Enforcement Issue 2020/3. 142. o.

Law enforcement history research at the lowest levels

Some law enforcement agencies have already recognised that law enforcement history is fundamental to the development of organisational culture. More and more regional and local police agencies have begun researching their own histories. At the end of the 1990s, one of the first to appear was the Csongrád County Police Headquarters' own historical work, published in 1999. The 87-page book covers the history of the police in the county from the expulsion of the Turks to the time of the book's publication.¹² The publication pays tribute to former captains and county leaders with a photo supplement and also includes photos of police buildings.¹³ Twenty years later, the Zala County Police Headquarters undertook to publish a similar publication. In addition to the historical description,¹⁴ the 185-page book also includes the results of archival research and interviews with former leaders about their lives.¹⁵ Contemporary newspaper articles and photographs in the appendix make the volume even more informative. In 2020, the 100th anniversary of the police force also gave a big boost to publications on police history, with several high-quality articles detailing the histories of individual agencies. At the same time, enthusiastic retired and active colleagues are also working on an "amateur basis" – compiling old management tables, arranging display cases, collecting photographs, and laying the foundations for the future operation of a home museum. It is interesting to note that the older surviving photographs can basically be divided into two groups. One group documents various ceremonies and staff meetings. At the same time, the other consists of photos taken at unit events and informal team-building meetings (Women's Day, the end-of-year ball, etc.). Unfortunately, disproportionately few photos of actual

¹² Dr. Zoltán Fülöp: History of the Police Forces of Csongrád County. Csongrád County Police Headquarters. Szeged, 1999. 7. o.

¹³ same place 76. o.

¹⁴ Katalin Simonyi: Chapters from the history of the police forces in Zala County. Zala County Police Headquarters. Zalaegerszeg, 2019. 21. o.

¹⁵ same place 59. o.

work have survived, as cameras were used less frequently in such situations.

The internal organisational history exhibition is also relevant to the Faculty of Law Enforcement Sciences at the National University of Public Service, as on September 11, 2025, as part of the ALUMNI Day, a summary exhibition entitled *"Excerpts from the History of Law Enforcement Education"* will open in the gallery of the St. László Chapel in the Ludovika Main Building.

The exhibition, which presents the history of education within the interior and law enforcement agencies, provides a comprehensive overview of the training instituted since 1971 and of the organisations whose officers have been educated and trained in higher law enforcement education in recent years. This presentation of organisational culture provides an accurate picture of the entire spectrum of law enforcement science, showcasing the professional organisations that perform law enforcement tasks, as well as their past and present. The exhibition panels also highlight the predecessor institutions that provided training for law enforcement agencies before the Police Academy, such as the Ybl Miklós Technical College and the Kosuth Lajos Military College.

The basic idea behind the exhibition was that, on the 30th anniversary of the Department of Border Guard Studies at the Faculty of Law Enforcement, the Border Guard Culture Foundation would host it. This room, which also serves as a classroom, was well received by visitors and the university and faculty leaders alike. After viewing the memorial room, Rector Gergely Deli suggested that the history of the National University of Public Service should also include an exhibition on the history of higher education in law enforcement. He offered the gallery of the St. László Chapel as the venue for this, and the Border Guard Culture Foundation was asked to develop the concept.

In addition to the rector of NKE, RTK also contributed to the necessary installation and material expenses to the extent possible, with the Development Department coordinating the purchases.

The Border Guard, Customs and Finance Guard, Penitentiary, and Immigration Departments, as well as the staff of the Disaster Management Institute and the Police Museum, played a key role in the current implementation of the exhibition, the selection of artefacts, and their acquisition and display. The Department of Law Enforcement Theory and History staff carried out the final coordination tasks.

The exhibition will continue to expand, allowing other departments to showcase their past. The artefacts, photographs, educational materials, and period uniforms displayed by the field of study provide an excellent illustration of the centuries-long history of law enforcement education. The exhibition is an excellent opportunity for university students and lecturers to expand their knowledge of the history of law enforcement education, while also commemorating former lecturers, commanders, and students alike.

The moving film history of law enforcement

Recently, some extremely interesting material for researchers of law enforcement history was posted on one of the most popular video-sharing sites, titled *"Once Upon a Time There Was a Police Academy."* Following digitisation, the RTF's own archive materials are now available to anyone. The former meetings, films depicting the internal life of the academy, and reports are of great interest to researchers, interested civilians, and former students alike. New films are constantly being added to the site, expanding the range of material on offer. Another excellent resource is the collection of educational films produced by the BM film studio, which has also been digitised in recent years. These materials are excellent chronicles of the socialist police force and other aspects of the first such film materials in the entire history of the Hungarian police force. The educational films often show a particular field of study or procedural method at the original locations with real actors, and thus serve as irreplaceable source material.

Summary

Research into the history of law enforcement undoubtedly creates new value. It is necessary to explore the positive and negative trends that characterised law enforcement activities in different periods. An objective, unbiased approach is essential for this, which is why a thorough exploration of the history of law enforcement around the time of the regime change can only really begin now. It is also important to find role models, outstanding professionals who have been forgotten today, "police scientists" whose life paths we can present to posterity as examples to follow. Historical research must serve organisational culture effectively and efficiently, and strengthen the organisation's closest possible ties. This is why it is important to expand the field of law enforcement history researchers continuously.