



BELGIAN SCIENCE POLICY



« Optimizing the use of the security monitoring scheme, developing a mini-monitoring scheme, a complementary module and methods for implementing the schemes »

**FEDERAL SCIENTIFIC POLICY
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The project for « *Optimizing the use of the security monitoring scheme, developing a mini-monitoring scheme, a complementary module and methods for implementing the schemes*» began in 1 December 2004. This project is intended to optimize the execution and the possibilities for exploiting the existing security monitoring scheme (mainly to the benefit of local authorities) without jeopardizing the possibility of making geographic comparisons or analysing trends over time. The research project was done in several phases:

1° A bibliographic study was done – the value and helpfulness of consulting victims retained our attention. Since the Dutch police monitoring scheme is partially similar to the Belgian security monitoring scheme, the background and developments of this instrument were considered.

2° The second part of the research project dealt with an analysis of needs in Flemish and Walloon police zones. The zones were chosen on the basis of various criteria, including the implementation of a security monitoring scheme, the existence of a security and prevention contract, local participation,... On the basis of interviews with Chiefs of police, strategic analysts and prevention officials, the following themes were analysed:

- The use or execution of a security monitoring scheme
- The questions/modules in the security monitoring scheme
- The use of other instruments
- The advantages and disadvantages of the security monitoring scheme in its current form
- What should or should not be modified in the security monitoring scheme
- The pertinence of developing a further monitoring scheme and the objectives of this tool should meet.

A range of needs was defined for the various zones. The main criteria for this instrument were also identified. The most common criticism is the cost incurred in zones that do not have a security and prevention contract and that would like to have a security monitoring scheme. Often, other choices are made in a zone consisting of a single municipality or, if it is hard to reach a decision, in a zone consisting of several municipalities. Some people are not convinced of the added value, others are aware that this is a strategic instrument that can really save time. Local authorities have often affirmed that a comparison of their zone or municipality with another local area is not the priority objective.

During the interviews, the question of the sample arose and doubts were expressed about its representativeness although scientific criteria show that the size of the sample is sufficient. Another comment made, that causes some hesitation, pertains to the fact that the questions are not sufficiently precise and specific on certain points. A police zone or a municipality wants to get information about what is actually happening in the territory, but the local authorities consider that the questions in the security monitoring scheme are not sufficiently pertinent on this point.

A criticism expressed regularly in scientific circles concerns the means of implementing the security monitoring scheme. The security monitoring scheme is implemented by telephone interviews based on a standard questionnaire (C.A.T.I. system). The fact that a certain number of households do not, or no longer, have a traditional fixed telephone connection and that the portable telephone market has exploded in recent years, have further accentuated criticism of the rate of non-responses, and consequently potentially increasing problems of non-representativeness. The length of the questionnaire is also a significant obstacle for this type of implementation. Given the amount of time needed (more than 20 minutes on the average), people get tired of it quite quickly or simply refuse to reply. In addition, because of certain imprecise concepts, it is not always possible to measure that which the survey was initially intended to measure.

Some people feel that the availability of the results of the monitoring scheme should correspond better to the political timetable and, for that reason, follow that timetable more closely.

The lack of support from the federal police is a criticism that has also been made on many occasions in analysing needs. This lack of support essentially relates to a lack of communication, the difficulty of interpreting results presented in a brief way (the lack of information on how the figures should be analysed), and again certain tables of results where the confidence intervals are missing.

During the face-to-face interviews with various local authorities, different modules have been reviewed. For police zones and municipalities, the "neighbourhood problem" module is generally considered to be very useful and helpful. The "police operations", "other contacts with the police" and "feeling of insecurity" modules can make a potential contribution to policy. However, the "victimization" and "complaints" modules got negative reactions insofar as the interpretation of the figures is not clear given the low frequencies observed in the sample at local level.

Both in Belgium and in the Netherlands, the number of local questionnaires is growing. In fact, local authorities are advised to back up their security zone plans with objective and subjective figures. Objective figures are not a problem (they consist essentially of police statistics), but the zones often have to create their own questionnaires in order to get objective data. The persons interviewed have indicated that there are a fair number of methodological errors in these questionnaires.

3° The next phase of the research project concerns consideration of methodological aspects: how the sample is taken, aspects pertaining to an opinion survey and the way it is implemented. In an opinion survey, alongside losses, a whole series of specific problems may arise: questions that are recalled several times and that can be considered as threatening, the tendency to approve everything, the seriousness of the researcher, his attitude and motivation, etc. As concerns the type of implementation, various schemes are possible: those used most often are telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews, written surveys done in the presence of the researcher, postal surveys and Internet surveys.

The biggest problem encountered in this aspect of the research project, is the bias pertaining to the current means of implementation. As has already been said, a growing number of people use portable telephones, and fewer and fewer people have a traditional fixed telephone line. This observation has given rise to the need to look into possible alternatives. Two important alternatives can be envisaged: face-to-face surveys, and a written questionnaire sent by mail. After assessing the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods, it seems that the telephone survey is still the best method for this type of consultation on a large scale. Here, we want to underline the advantage of a certain analysis of non-responses. It is recommended to make up for "losses" by using other survey methods, like for example face-to-face interviews. This is what Dillman from Washington State University calls the « mixed mode ». This method would also enrich the results and analyses of the monitoring survey with a more qualitative approach.

4° In the next-to-last point of this study, a series of models have been developed that could well change the future of the security monitoring scheme. Creating an ideal monitoring survey that would answer all the needs experienced in the field is always a utopian concept.

A series of models, that the security monitoring scheme should optimize, have been submitted to a few focus groups, particularly to local focus groups consisting of Walloon and Flemish respondents, plus a focus group made up of representatives of the federal level

(services and institutions that directly or indirectly use the results of the security monitoring scheme).

Opinions proved very different on this subject. The diversity of these opinions can to a large extent be explained by differences in the concept of the local and federal players.

As a complement to these focus groups, a discussion with strategic analysts at federal level was organized. These analysts drew attention to the fact that the victimization and complaints module should not be the subject of 350 contacts in each zone. For this module, a sample that provides representative results in a judicial district suffices. Secondly, as concerns improving the questions, it would be particularly judicious if one could ask about physical, psychological and moral damages in the victimization module. Thirdly, the question must be asked as to whether questions pertaining to crime be incorporated in the monitoring survey. This question need not be asked to everyone; questioning 3000 respondents seems largely sufficient here.

A definitive model was finally submitted to the members of the Accompanying Committee and accepted by them. In this model, the "victimization and complaints" module will be financed at federal level and applied on the scale of the judicial district. Within the "police operations" and "other police contacts" modules, a distinction will be made between strategic and operational questions. The strategic questions will be found on the part financed at federal level and will be submitted to all police zones. This means that 350 respondents in the 196 police zones will be asked strategic questions in the "appreciation of police operations" and "other police contacts" modules. In addition, the "feeling of insecurity" module is also included. Operational questions still remain in the "police operations" module and the "other police contacts" module as well as the "neighbourhood problems" module. For the remaining modules, the following proposal was made: the current situation can be maintained for the fifty-eight local units which currently have a security monitoring scheme (because of the fact that they have a security and prevention contract). In these places, continuity of the instrument should be given priority ahead of other objectives. The other units must make use of local resources in order to ask the various questions. As concerns the additional monitoring scheme, time, financial resources and know-how are important constraints. The zones manage to find ways to meet their desires. Another thing that could change is the implementation of a mini-monitoring scheme, which will only be implemented in four years' time. This means that the implementation depends on the political timetable. For the implementation of the additional monitoring scheme, financial resources of local authorities are again decisive. The model presented previously is suggested by the research teams.

During this study, a good number of proposals were made for changes or additional questions. The questions to be added concern issues, among others, that are related to the five pillars of the community police philosophy. Certain questions measuring the frequency and seriousness of problems were incorporated in the "neighbourhood problems" module. At the same time, the objective was to examine whether people really make a distinction between the assignments of the federal police and those of the local police. In the "victimization and complaints" module, the following elements have been included: the "loot" for the perpetrator, consequential damages for the victim, the number of medical consultations and the number of days of incapacitation for work. A new module was also proposed: one concerning the crime, in which a list of priorities is submitted to respondents. Respondents must indicate what they consider unimportant and what has priority in their opinion. Questions that were modified or added were submitted to the members of the Accompanying Committee in a subsequent phase. The Committee had various types of comments. Criticism was taken into account and integrated in the readjusted questionnaire which then moved into a test phase. Here are some of the general comments on the testing:

the test took place in the Brussels-capital region, where the percentage of victimization is (unsurprisingly) very high (more than 50%). Certain operational questions came to light in the Brussels police zone concerning part of the scheme and the possibility of an additional monitoring scheme. All of this was also tested. The two monitoring schemes were not implemented in different ways. Everything was done at one time, so that all questions could be asked successively.

Seeking representativeness of results was not possible. Nor was this the objective. Many people refused or gave up, for a whole series of reasons: the questions seem too difficult, the questionnaire took too much time to be completed, etc. The test also showed certain methodological errors, and superfluous questions were identified. After analysing the results, a few questions were reviewed and included in the questionnaire presented by the research team. An important lesson in this stage also consisted of realizing the average time devoted to the implementation of the survey.

5° The last point of the research project focused on setting up the additional scheme. The objective of this scientific research is not to question the value of the security monitoring scheme, nor to make it an instrument that can measure everything and comprehend everything. For the contracting authority, a choice must be made:

"Either we want this information for a strategic analysis of the vicinity in the security sector as a whole, or for an operational analysis in view of the qualitative control of police supervision in local police zones. The distinction between a strategic analysis of the vicinity and operational feedback on police operations is strategically important for the future operations of the police."

A methodology has been developed in which local authorities can continue to monitor local problems. The plan includes a few important points. First of all, it is important to make a distinction between strategic information and operational information. The research team suggests drawing strategic information from the mini-monitoring scheme, and operational information from the additional monitoring scheme.

The first stage in using the additional scheme is to determine the objective, which is always a major issue. In fact, must a policy be prepared or assessed? One must not lose sight of the the political cycle as concerns security. The objective must also be determined: is this a geographic region, a phenomenon, a problematic, a target group or group at risk? One must be aware that choosing a target group, for example, also means doing an assessment at the level of the target group. Consequently, a serious overview of the target group must be obtained before doing an analysis. From that point, one goes on to the analysis or the objective appraisal of given problems, which will result in range of possibilities. In any case, one must not lose sight of the current state of affairs in taking stock of the elements and questionnaires that already exist on the subject. After this comes the methodological aspect and particularly the choice of an adequate technique for managing the questionnaires. This is where the sample or the target population should be defined. The choice of a questionnaire from among an inventory of existing instruments is the next stage. Last of all, the creation of a specific questionnaire can be envisaged.

The research team has made its main recommendations and observations here. We are aware that we were not able to respond to all of the questions and concerns that may arise. This is no accident. The research team is convinced that major decisions must be taken for the future development of this very useful instrument. Trying to respond to everything would be illusionary here, and would get us nowhere. The fact that considerable misunderstanding and a lack of confidence are still found at local level with regard to the security monitoring

scheme, can be dealt with in view of the objectives defined that one wants to attain, and communicating them clearly and coherently to users. Today, the research team is convinced that this report can make a constructive contribution to decision taking.