



Criminalistics, police science, forensic sciences – reflections on the anniversary of the Hungarian Association of Police Science

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Abstract

Aim: The article aims to explain the various concepts, tasks and interfaces of criminalistics, and to explore their relationship with police and forensic science, which often vary from author to author.

Methodology: The study provides a synthesis by analysing domestic and foreign literature.

Findings: Criminalistics is a possible and forward-looking formulation of the general methodology of fact-finding for law enforcement purposes, a scientific cognition within a legal framework, for legal purposes. It has a co-extensive relationship with law enforcement, with numerous interfaces and mutual interactions throughout their history. Forensic science is framed by criminalistics, but they are not identical.

Value: The paper presents the complex relationship between forensic science and criminalistics, attempts to define forensic science, and discusses the *Sydney Declaration* and its significance.

Keywords: criminalistics, law enforcement, forensics, Sydney Declaration

Criminalistics

'When we came together a few years ago [...] and then split into several parties, each one defending their own truth with maximum passion, I realised there were more "principles" and "general" truths than necessary.' (Zsoldos, 1987).

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There is a long and complex scientific concept of criminalistics. At the core of this concept, criminalistics is a multidisciplinary criminal science that develops scientifically based tools, methods and procedures for the detection, proof, and prevention of crime following the existing legislation (Balláné, 2019; Balláné & Lakatos, 2012). According to some definitions, criminalistics is also an applied science of fact (Fenyvesi, 2014) and its task is to mitigate the effects of crime (Fenyvesi, 2013).

In another approach, criminalistics is the science of investigation (Kertész, 1965; Fenyvesi, 2013). From a criminalistic point of view, the investigation is a multifaceted intellectual and practical activity aimed at the truthful reconstruction of a relevant past event and the achievement of procedural objectives, which can be achieved by the planned, conscious execution of necessary and possible actions following the relevant procedural rules (Lakatos, 2005).

This second approach is more fortunate in that it is conceptually detached from criminal offenses and criminal proceedings. Even in the recent literature on criminalistics, there is a view that criminalistics is, as a rule, attached to criminal procedure law (Kovács, 2023). I do not dispute that criminalistics in its original approach was indeed an auxiliary science of criminal procedure law, of which today I do not feel that it is the auxiliary science that is inappropriate, but criminal procedure. The criminal police themselves do not only work in the context of criminal procedure, just think of wanted persons, or the procedure following extraordinary deaths.

These differences can be very difficult to understand with a criminal procedure-based mindset. For example, the subtitle of a recent textbook on the scene investigation states: *'the subject of this monograph is the inspection conducted in the context of criminal investigations – it does not deal with the inspection of accident scenes – but it also tries to study the detection and evidentiary (investigative) aspects of it'* (Gárdonyi, 2023). And what is the problem with that? The book certainly does not deal with the investigation of traffic accidents, but some of them do take place in the context of criminal proceedings (some traffic accidents are the result of traffic offenses). On the other hand, other non-traffic but fatal accidents are considered as extraordinary deaths under the Health Act, and the criminal police will carry out exactly the inspection activities detailed in the textbook, but under the administrative procedural law.

This highlights the problem that, in many cases, the teaching of criminalistics has an impact on the theory of criminalistics. This is not necessarily a problem in itself. However, it is thought-provoking that the criminalistics of traffic offenses is hardly ever discussed in criminalistics classes, with the possible exception of the crime reconstruction. Criminalistics and criminal investigation

are usually taught to police officer candidates by former or active criminal investigation officers, and the traffic department's accident scene training is not taught by the criminal investigation instructors. (I assume that accident scene investigation is taught by the traffic department staff.) The theory of criminalistics, the big picture, is also sorely lacking in the material taught in the criminal intelligence studies. Even though tactful inquiry, background checking, and surveillance are also included in the teaching of criminalistics. So-called "operations", "games", and "disinformation" (technical terms of criminal intelligence) should play a cardinal role in the learning of criminal methodics. It is completely unnecessary to teach students something twice, and it is completely wrong to teach two different things under the same name.

The effect of criminal procedure law is that we also talk about evidence procedures in criminalistics, but we have a separate chapter on 'tactics of coercive measures'. Why? Because the procedural code says that seizure, search, and perquisition are not evidentiary procedures, but coercive measures. More precisely, the current code no longer talks about house searches, only searches. It is like the search of a person, a vehicle, a dwelling, a forest, or a backwater would require the same process. Or, as if, from a criminalistic point of view, these investigative acts were not carried out for the purpose of detection and proof. Despite the change in procedural law, it still makes sense to talk about searches and car searches as investigative acts, in terms of criminalistics. Just as the methodology is not tied to substantive law. Under the Criminal Code, burglary of a dwelling, breaking into a storage room, breaking into a car, theft of a bicycle by cutting the lock chain, or theft of sports shoes by removing the product label will be theft by violence against objects. From a criminalistic point of view, however, burglary of a dwelling includes the non-destructive opening of a lock, which at most constitutes a misdemeanour under the criminal law. Perhaps even more illustrative is "occupational endangerment", which may in fact be a fall from a height, electrocution, being hit by a work machine, hunting accident or medical malpractice – a different set of events, requiring different evidence, requiring different experts.

It is a precarious terrain for the educational or academic processing of widely used criminal tactics in practice, which raises concerns among academics of criminalistics who are law-abiding and rely primarily on the procedural code. This could be, for example, the pre-interrogation 'interview' with the suspect (or the witness), which is essential to establish psychological contact, create the right atmosphere, or tire out the suspect (or the witness) who is acting out or playing a role. Procedural law has nothing to do with these 'conversations', as they cannot in any way result in evidence of a procedural nature. However,

it does not follow that such conversations are prohibited. An analogy is offered: refusal to participate in the instrumental verification of a confession (polygraph test) should not harm the witness or the suspect. However, such information can still orient the investigation.

The one kind of criminalistics

I have long been convinced that there is only one kind of criminalistics (Petrétei & Angyal, 2018). It is used by the spotter when conducting surveillance, the detective when conducting an inquiry, the scene of crime officer when conducting a crime scene investigation, and the inspector when conducting an interview. But it is also used by the judge when he takes evidence in a trial or conducts a confrontation, under the principle of immediacy. (I must insert the piquant comment that confrontation is probably only useful in court, it is of no practical use in the investigating office, but can be more damaging – the conflict between testimonies can be a driving force in the investigation, but suspects who know each other’s testimonies can be its hindrance.) The same criminalistics are used by the accident scene investigator, and the crash reconstruction expert after a traffic accident, the fire investigator of the disaster management, the explosion scene investigators of the Bomb Squad Unit of the Rapid Response Police Force, or the private investigator. In criminalistic terms, an inspection will be the external examination of the body and the autopsy, an inspection will also be when the forensic expert saws apart the lock insert in search of traces of a non-destructive opening (Elek, 2015). A test firing by a firearm expert, and a high fall reconstructed in a three-dimensional model of the scene using virtual reality software are also crime reconstruction. The same communication, social, and psychological skills are used during the inquiry as during the interrogation of the suspect, and during the dynamic phase of the crime scene investigation, much of the same (also) as during any search.

The concept of one kind of criminalistics is also not supported by the entertainment industry, and the media have an undeniable impact on public and professional thinking. This can be seen as an extension of the CSI effect (Angyal, 2019b). It may seem a frivolous suggestion, but imagine Hercule Poirot in the company of *CSI: Miami* as they unravel a murder mystery. Grotesque? And is it just the different era and culture? Then imagine Lieutenant Columbo with the detective duo from the *Lethal Weapon* films – all of them were LAPD officers in the 1980s (not to mention the *Beverly Hills cop*).

The approach that there is only one kind of criminalistics can of course make education difficult. Virtually any textbook on criminalistics will have the vast majority of the professional recommendations described in the interrogation section refer to the investigative act carried out by the investigating authority in a one-man office during an ongoing investigation. You need to prepare the case file, create comfortable and calm conditions, and so on. But how does a private investigator conduct an interrogation? The obvious answer is that the testimony of a “witness” and a “suspect” is an evidentiary instrument as defined in the procedural code, and therefore cannot be produced by a civilian. Is that a proper answer? Hardly. We can start juggling with the words that a private investigator can conduct questioning, not interrogation, but in that case, we should be able to explain with philosophical sophistication how questioning differs from interrogation because if only in the procedural framework, we are at the same position. If the content is the same, it is precisely the elaboration of this content that is the terrain of criminalistics, and this is what is left out of most curricula. Not to mention the interrogations in administrative proceedings (the minor should preferably be interviewed at their address), or the interrogations (and confrontations) in criminal proceedings that the judge will conduct during the trial.

If there are no criminalistics recommendations that are independent of the law of criminal procedure, the autonomy and scientific nature of criminalistics will be called into question. On the other hand, we are confused if we try to look for disguised surveillance in procedural law, or for the background checking that is not carried out by the probation officer. On the one hand, they are used in the practice of criminalistics, and they are also mentioned in textbooks. In other words, they exist without a specific legal background. The specific law only provides the framework and defines the purpose. This is an extremely important consideration. There is also a concept of criminalistics as a practical method: (scientific) cognition carried out within a legal framework and for legal purposes (Angyal, 2016; Angyal, 2019a). In other words, criminalistics is the general methodology of fact-finding for legal application (Balláné, 2019), and if it does not currently fulfill this role, it is primarily an important task of the scientific cultivation of criminalistics.

Three approaches to criminalistics can therefore coexist: science, practice, and subject (Finszter, 2021). The traditional division of criminalistics is primarily for educational purposes and follows educational criteria. It can be divided into general and specific parts, the former including technique, tactics, and, more recently, strategy and the theory of criminalistics, formerly known as methodology. The specific part is methodics. This is a perfect division for the preparation of the curriculum and the organization of lessons, but in ‘reality’, of course, the

criminal technique does not exist in itself; the tools and knowledge of technique are mainly used during crime scene investigation, or possibly during perquisition or searches. The crime scene investigation, perquisition, and search take place in the course of a primary crime responding measures, or in a planned way, in the course of an ongoing investigation, which is the field of methodics. And in the context of metotics, the teaching of tactics and criminal intelligence would need to be fully synergistic if we are to approach reality.

The criminalistics of the digital sphere were traditionally associated with criminal technics in the 1990s, when the digital evidence was the computer seized from someone's study. Today, as we are surrounded by smart devices with their web of contacts, location data, notes, calendars, photos, and passwords, the quantity and quality of seizable hardware has changed. Not to mention the traceability of all the data we generate about ourselves: our phone logs up to telecommunication towers, we pay with our credit card at various places, and our car registration number is read at toll gates. It is possible to conduct a detailed background check of a person, based on what they post on social networking sites, and what they do online. A hacking attack can be traced back to the perpetrator by the digital trail. We are at the dawn of the Internet of Things (IoT), where our household appliances will communicate with us and each other online. Will a robot vacuum cleaner be able to remotely read the floor plan of your home? We are also just beginning to see the criminalist use of artificial intelligence, and we don't know where it will lead. Alongside criminal technics and tactics, it will be appropriate to introduce a separate discipline dealing with digital crime signals, which could be called, for example, criminal cybernetics (Petrétei, 2022). The phenomena of the digital world are certainly pushing the boundaries of the philosophical concept of matter. In the digital world, uniqueness, difference, causality, interaction, and reflection are completely different from those in the material world, and therefore the general theories of criminalistics need to be rethought, the universality of these philosophical propositions, their applicability, or what is in their place, need to be examined. Or (dialectically) what are the overarching principles that include principles that apply in the material and digital world? (*Or not*. The perceived importance of this question is tempered by the fact that the Department of Cybercrime at the Ludovika University of Public Service was abolished years ago.)

The other problem with the educational division is that the world has moved on a little. It may be a perplexing question: where do crime prevention, operational case analysis, offender profiling, instrumental verification of confessions, and data mining, all belong? Not to mention where crime scene investigation, for example, has grown to: blood stain patternanalysis is not considered

a traceology specialty abroad, but a scene of crime specialty. But we could also mention forensic archaeology, fire investigation, coroner's inquests, traffic accident investigation, investigation at the scene of a fatal mass casualty incident or CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) incident, etc. I do not necessarily know of a "better" division for criminalistics, but I would stress that the general/special division discussed above is for educational purposes only, and this should not be lost sight of. In fact, the way in which the criminal directorate of a typical police headquarters is structured: detection, investigation, inspection, data analysis and evaluation, crime prevention, and forensics.

Criminalistics and police study

The scientific concept of criminalistics and the concept of criminalistics as a practical activity are certainly the same in one respect: they do not contain any reference to law enforcement or police science. Let me hasten to say that, in my opinion, this is just fair enough. In my opinion, criminalistics is in no way part of the police studies, but is an independent science in a subsidiary relationship. It is not that the scientific concept of criminalistics (an applied multidisciplinary science of criminal facts that is part of police science) does not withstand, it is just that what I have said so far has tried to point in the direction of criminalistics being much more than recommendations and theoretical knowledge of the activities of the criminal police in criminal proceedings.

Of course, there are numerous links between law enforcement and criminalistics, bearing in mind their coexisting relationship. I am not just referring to the fact that the conduct of most investigations can be guaranteed by the legitimate right to use force vested in the investigating authorities as law enforcement agencies. This is not entirely universal: the public prosecutor's office, the commander of a civil aircraft, or the military commander authorized to conduct a command investigation, are not law enforcement agencies. If we interpret criminalistics strictly, they are still entitled to investigate. But if we take a broad view, then there are private investigators, judges, fire inspectors, experts, and so on, who have no right to use force, although in some cases they may request assistance from law enforcement agencies, investigating authorities (although a private investigator may do no more than any ordinary citizen, for example to protect their physical integrity or personal liberty.)

However, the individual investigative acts themselves may also have a strong law enforcement connection. During the initial crime respond measures, criminal investigators work as closely as possible with law enforcement. In the majority

of cases, a crime scene investigation cannot be carried out without securing the scene, which allows unauthorized persons to be removed or excluded from the scene. A search of a vehicle can only be carried out safely if the basic principles of tactical measures are considered. A search of open terrain or woodland requires platoon or company level tactical skills. In addition, predictive policing (Mátyás et al., 2020) is a concrete transition between criminalistics and law enforcement, both in theoretical and practical terms.

According to László Korinek, police study is situated at the borderline between criminal science and public administration (Korinek, 2007), and most definitions place criminalistics within the scope of criminal sciences. I also agree with Zoltán Hautzinger that criminalistics has had a major impact on the development of police study (Hautzinger, 2015). The creation of the criminal police, the ‘detective corps’, the ‘investigative officers’ was practically linked to the particular stage of development of criminalistics. I disagree, however, with Hautzinger’s statements about the demarcation of the two disciplines, because he seems to feel that an important aspect is the narrower focus of criminalistics and its narrower spectrum of connections with other disciplines. If I agree with the former in substance (even though I define criminalistics much more broadly than Hautzinger does in the cited article), I do not agree with the latter aspect. Criminal technics have very broad boundaries with most of the technical and natural sciences, and tactics are linked to communication and linguistics, in addition to psychology and sociology. In addition, the broad theories of criminalistics draw heavily on areas of philosophy (epistemology, logic, philosophy of language), mathematics (probability, statistics, set theory), frontier areas (information theory, systems theory, game theory, cybernetics) and so on. This is not a value judgement in itself, but it is still an accepted scientific result (Angyal et al., 2018). And returning for a moment to the so-called narrower focus of criminalistics: can we really use the single label of “crime responding” to investigate a serial burglary, an unknown homicide, a (self-administered?) drug overdose, or a budget fraud? How about the fatal hunting accident, the dental malpractice, the catching of the hiding perpetrator? The tragedy of the *Hableány* (Mermaid) cruise ship in relation to the traffic crime and the identification of the remains of the foreign victims? The complex action against drug crime, which could (also) begin with the identification of a hitherto unknown group of compounds in the laboratory of the Institute for DrugsAnalysis?

Forensic sciences and the Sydney Declaration

The very broad boundaries of criminalistics bring us to the issue of forensic sciences. The word forensic is derived from the Latin *forensis* (*forum* + *-ēnsis*) meaning of or relating to a forum; and *forum* means the forum or scene of litigation. That is, everything is forensic that is brought before a (judicial) forum. The Hungarian translation of forensic science may be *törvényszéki tudományok* (“court” sciences), although the experts and their specialties were changed names to justice after 1945 (when the law courts were renamed from “*törvényszék*”). Today, the court name is “*törvényszék*” again, but it remains to be seen whether this will lead to a change in the nomenclature.

Forensic science and criminalistics are not synonymous, their relationship is complex. In the lexicon ([URL1](#)) published by OSAC (Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science), a US federal government agency operating under the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the definition of ‘forensic’ is as given above, i.e. it is understood to mean the methods, procedures and techniques of making findings of fact, (expert) opinions and conclusions that can be used in legal proceedings. The same lexicon, on the other hand, defines ‘criminalistics’ as a branch of forensic science concerned with the examination and interpretation of physical evidence in order to facilitate investigations.

This narrowing of the concept is worrying. If we talk only about criminal justice, we exclude several genuinely judicial (forensic) and genuinely academic disciplines. One can think of family law, where the genetic expert (paternity) or the psychological expert (custody and supervision of a minor child) have responsibilities. In social insurance cases, the medical expert who examines the ability to work (‘disability’) is also involved. Engineering experts, accountant experts are perhaps more often involved in civil litigation than in criminal cases. If we focus particularly or primarily on physical evidence, the place and role of psychological experts, psychiatric experts, accountant experts is called into question - all this in a way that the lexicon itself consistently speaks of legal proceedings, not investigations or criminal proceedings, in the glossaries for each specialism.

One of the most high-profile events in the field in recent years was the publication of the *Sydney Declaration* ([URL2](#)). This document, just one and a half pages long, contains the concept and seven principles of forensic science, which the authors explain in detail in a professional article ([Roux et al., 2022](#)). Forensic

science, according to the Declaration, is a case-based, research-oriented endeavour using the principles of science to study and understand traces through their detection, recognition, examination and interpretation to understand anomalous events of public interest. (Public affairs events are not limited to criminal offenses, but include litigation and security incidents as examples.) Traces are used in the broadest sense of the term when they are understood as lesions left behind as a result of a past act (presence or activity). In the article on the Declaration referred to, this is the only time when psychological and digital evidence are mentioned alongside physical evidence. Otherwise, unfortunately, the rest of the paper focuses only on the physical evidence.

The one-sided emphasis on physical evidence is consistent with another study (Ristenbatt et al., 2022), written in collaboration with some of the authors of the declaration and the paper presenting it, which argues that traceology is concerned with the detection, recognition, identification, and interpretation of physical lesions as a whole (and that trasology is the third key concept alongside criminalistics and forensic science). A ‘trace’ can be a symptom, as in medical diagnosis; it can be an index, pointing to what exists; and it can be a sign, revealing something beyond its mere existence. Umberto Eco presents a very similar division in his volume *The Limits of Interpretation* (Eco, 2013). So there is the trace, the symptom and the indication. The trace is in fact a code, which refers to another object by its formal characteristics. But this relation is synecdochical, since the trace of the sole of the shoe refers to the sole of the shoe, which is completed by our thinking into a shoe, or even a person. A symptom is a lesion that suggests a class of physical causes that create it, but there is no point-to-point correspondence as with a trace (for example, the perpetrator wipes away a dusty surface, but there is no outline that makes us see that it is a hand or footprint). An indicia is a residue that refers to a previous owner, in a broad sense (i.e. from a fragment of an object to an identity document).

The principles of the *Sydney Declaration* are:

- 1) Presence and activity leave traces, which are essential, perceptible and meaningful sources of information about events.
- 2) A scene inspection is a scientific and diagnostic endeavour, requiring scientific expertise, and the search for and interpretation of the lesions left behind requires a qualified person, broad scientific literacy, personal skills and the use of technical means for reconstruction and identification.
- 3) Forensic science is case-based, based on scientific knowledge, investigative methodology and logical conclusions. The case-based nature of the concept means that it is a study of one-off, isolated events in the past, which cannot be repeated for the sake of a more in-depth investigation.

- 4) Forensic science evaluates results with context because of temporal asymmetry. The whole of a past event cannot be directly known, only fragmentary, deteriorating, variable, incomplete traces of it can be used to build a model that provides an explanation, a possible scenario for the lesions found. To do this, knowledge of the context is essential: inference cannot provide ‘certain’ answers, only in the context of possible explanatory models/scenarios can the relative value of a given lesion be estimated. This must be based on a solid scientific foundation and on unbiased and transparent peer review.
- 5) Forensic science deals with an infinite range of uncertainties. From the mechanism of imprinting to the formulation of an opinion, professionals face uncertainty at every step. Uncertainty can be studied but cannot be eliminated.
- 6) The goals and contributors of forensic science can be interpreted in many dimensions. Through the in-depth study of clues in the broad sense, it can reveal important information about crime, the black market, phenomena that threaten or concern society, contribute to successful detection and investigation, and support decision-making in legal proceedings.
- 7) The results of forensic science find their meaning in context. This means that they have no value on their own, independent of context; it is all the information in the case that gives the true meaning to the observations and findings. Some in the scientific community and some in the legal community dispute this position, arguing that background information about the case can bias the expert. Bias is a real problem, but it is necessary to distinguish between irrelevant background information and information that is contextual to the case, because the latter is arguably necessary for the formulation and evaluation of findings of fact and conclusions. To do this, there must be a sound ethical standard to draw the line between the information needed and the information that influences it.

The research-oriented character of the concept is not explicitly mentioned, but it is there in the background of the first, third and fourth principles. The research-oriented nature means that the truth about the event under investigation is not known; there are only statements, testimonies, assumptions about it. Nor will the truth be revealed in one fell swoop in the course of an investigation: it is forensic science that is capable of producing a finite number of possible explanations, of working out possible scenarios. The truth will be established by the trial court in the facts of the case (‘*res iudicata pro veritas habetur*’ – the thing judged must be held to be true) (Angyal, 2019a).

Criminalistics and forensic sciences

The proclamation of the seven principles contained in the *Sydney Declaration* was extremely significant and timely, and can be seen as a response to efforts to bring about the decline of criminalistics and forensic sciences in the longer term. A notorious summary of these efforts is the so-called PCAST (President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology) report, which has provoked outrage in the field in the United States and has prompted a number of respected professional organizations to raise well-founded objections (Petrétei, 2023). An article, mostly by Swiss authors, describes as particularly worrying that forensic disciplines are becoming distant and segmented (Baechler et al., 2020), all in order to avoid possible bias, actually causing more harm than good. According to Professor Christophe Champod, also from Switzerland, different expert opinions (footprints, dactyloscopic traces, identification of DNA residues) are able to link together cases that were previously thought to be independent. Forensic data, placed in the context of place-time, target and modus operandi, helps to detect and track criminal phenomena. This is a very significant societal benefit (Champod, 2014).

The concept of forensic science in the Declaration, if the word 'trace' is interpreted in an expansive way, i.e. it is also applied to the psychological and digital spheres, can be equated with the concept of domestic forensic science that I am advocating. However, I can no longer accept this. In my own interpretation, criminalistics and forensic sciences, as I have already indicated, have a more complex relationship than to think of them as a purely interchangeable concept. Forensic sciences are (always plural!) the 'corners', 'nooks' or layers of established, existing, recognised scientific areas that serve the purposes of justice, of the application of the law. These are not at all part of criminalistics, of criminaltechnics: forensic medicine is part of medicine, and perhaps most of all pathology, forensic chemistry is part of chemistry, forensic physics is part of physics, forensic genetics is part of genetics, and so on. Criminalistics, on the other hand, integrates the forensic disciplines as a framework for the criminal justice, by influencing the methodology and practice of the forensic sciences through its general theories and the mindset of the investigator. On the other hand, as a practical framework, it organises the investigation, detection, evidence and the use of forensic experts, and analyses and evaluates the results of these activities. Thirdly, and not insignificantly, criminalistics itself has developed forensic fields that are not part of any (existing, recognised) sciences: such as trace and pattern recognition, ridgeology, firearm identification, handwriting comparison, questioned documents, which are classical fields, or facial

recognition, which is an emerging field (Mészáros & Petrétei, 2023), or voice recognition, which adapts technical solutions used in other fields.

The statement that criminalistics influences and frames the forensic disciplines can in fact be supported by the sixth principle of the Declaration. By uncovering the truth, the expert assists the administration of justice, which ideally, in a properly functioning state, has an impact on the effectiveness of law enforcement. A good forensic chemical expert is not only a chemist, they must also understand the workings of law enforcement and the judiciary and the current situation and trends in drug crime. They must be able to spot the emergence of a new additive or the discovery by investigating authorities of drugs of suspiciously identical composition in different seizures in different proceedings.

Closing

‘When we came together a few years ago [...] and then split into several parties, each one defending their own truth with maximum passion, I realised there were more “principles” and “general” truths than necessary. Not wanting to be left behind, I produced a few of my own, which the others were as uninterested in as I was in theirs – all in all, the meeting and the debate proved to be extremely useful.’ (Zsoldos, 1987).

My aim with this study, which pays tribute to the jubilee of the Hungarian Association of Police Science, was not to put yet another criminalistics concept on the table, but rather to attempt to synthesise existing, often contradictory approaches. Furthermore, I wanted to integrate the equally diverse conceptual approach of the ‘forensic science(s)’ and to situate all these in relation to law enforcement. Further, I wanted to introduce the highly significant *Sydney Declaration*, briefly referring to the professional context to which it was born in response. In conclusion, I wanted to point out that the science of criminalistics is not a closed static system, but that even its foundations must, should, or can be reinterpreted in the light of scientific, technological, and social change.

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