

## A BRAVE POLICE FORCE DESERVES COURAGEOUS SCIENTISTS

AFTER-DINNER ADDRESS AT CEPOL POLICE RESEARCH AND  
SCIENCE CONFERENCE 2009

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The title of this conference is 'Future policing in Europe: A shared agenda for research' and I am pleased that the organizers of this conference think I am able to say something meaningful about this subject. Whether or not this will be the case is of course for you to judge after my speech, but there can be no doubt that I find the subject of crucial importance for future policing.

### Science and policing in a fast changing world

Science and policing used to be far apart. Policing was (and of course to a great extent still is) primarily about crime fighting and safer neighbourhoods and science is about theoretically explaining things we do not understand yet. Policing used to be only mildly interesting from a scientists' perspective: the police had some well defined tasks (primarily upholding the law) in a relative stable world. However, technological en societal change has accelerated considerably in the second half of the twentieth century and does not seem to slow down; now or in the foreseeable future. If we compare the concerns and operations of police forces today with only ten years ago, a totally new world of policing has emerged. The programme of this conference is a good indication, with issues like fundamental shifts in the function and organisation of policing, policing cyberspace, radicalisation, techno-policing, knowledge led policing, private policing and dealing with diversity.

These issues have in common that adequately dealing with them presupposes understanding technological en societal change. At the same time a police force is not research institution and there is an urgent need to act in face of current societal problems. Thus an intimate relation with science is necessary for problem solving in a fast changing world. We need to be aware of what is happening around us and we need to be innovative while at the same time the pressure to come up with concrete results is rising. And – perhaps most importantly – we need to organize critical reflection on our ideas and operations to prevent us from taking a wrong turn and sticking to it to long. In an information and network society a police force can not wait for directions of others about what to do, we are supposed to know ourselves what is needed to reach the objectives that are expected from us.

### Science and policing: history and current state of affairs

As a police officer I first learned to appreciate the value of science as a consequence of my relations with the Technical University in Delft. This resulted in hiring a for the police force atypical group of people who still play an important role today in our force with regard to technological development and intelligence led policing. Today, a lot of strange characters are contributing to security in the Amsterdam-Amstelland police force, and (senior) officers regard it as necessary and normal to constantly educate themselves in connection with various universities. Luckily, the love of the police for science was not a one-way street. Science and scientists also discovered policing as a subject worthwhile of attention. Police science has developed into a mature field with a growing number of students and valuable publications. And the Dutch police – the combined 25 Dutch police forces – has truly become a 'thinking organization' with a common vision (with the title *The police in evolution*) and a shared strategy agenda containing the main themes for policing for the years to come. The relation between science and the police is also very visible at the level of

the different police forces. As an illustration I will explain the way we organised this in the Amsterdam-Amstelland police force.

### Science in the Amsterdam-Amstelland police force

On a strategic level we constructed a 'think tank' with direct function relation to the top of the organisation. We named the think tank the Agora, referring to the place where in the Greek city states matters of public importance were discussed freely and critically. The Agora is explicitly meant to be a critical forum and is supposed to contradict especially the Chief Commissioner whenever necessary. As you will understand, I will deny that contradicting me is ever necessary, but I advise every Chief Commissioner to organize his or her own independent countervailing power. At the Agora different insights and actors come together, starting of course with relevant research outside or within the police force. The themes of the strategic agenda of the Dutch police play a prominent role in structuring and further developing knowledge at the Agora. Also, there is an intimate relation with the Bureau of Management Information and Research of our police force: data are used to make our strategic (and operational) decisions information based, research is done to ensure that it is also knowledge based. The Agora is also the linking pin to the scientific community and more specific to our 'joint ventures' with Universities.

### Three chairs and related research

**First**, we participate in a chair at the University of Leuven under the title *Knowledge discovery from databases Amsterdam-Amstelland police force*. As the title suggests, this is about advanced data mining technology in order to utilise our data more effectively. Police forces have in general an enormous amount of potentially very interesting data which are only used when needed to conduct our primary task. However, these data are hardly used to understand the phenomena we are dealing with, while – as I said earlier – understanding the world and the consequences for police strategy and operations is crucial.

**Second**, together with the city of Amsterdam we participate in a chair of the Free University of Amsterdam under the title *Security and Citizenship*. The fact that we cooperate with the city of Amsterdam

in this chair is very important. As you can imagine, both the city and the police force share the ambition of making the city a safer place to live in, but their organisational logic can be different. Both parties agreed that by funding this chair they want to be confronted with insights that might not be very welcome from an organisation perspective, but that do contribute to the increase of social security.

### Example of valuable research

To give an example. In coming up with priorities there is of course close cooperation between the police force and the administration. Data play an important role in this, and there is a combined committee where the data are analysed as to facilitate the setting of priorities. We had the intuition that the analysis of the data led to looking towards the future in the rear mirror: using data about what has happened to set future priorities. The research group Security and Citizenship was asked to look at what was – as it were – behind the data: which mechanisms are at work? They came up with the idea not to analyse crime figures but to research crime inducing factors. This led to a map of Amsterdam showing where to expect a future rise of crime and which factors might be responsible for that in different areas. Depending on which factors were important with regard to which issues and areas, recommendations for the strategy and operations of both the police force and the administration could be made. Because the chair – although financed by the city and the police force – is independent the results (some of which were not opportune to either the police or the city) could be made public and got a lot of attention in the media. This makes it harder to ignore the results, also the results that might contradict current policy. Science can function as a necessary – although not always welcome – impulse for critical reflection.

**Third**, in collaboration with the Dutch police academy we are now working on organizing a third chair with the assignment to determine what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for research to have an impact on day to day policing. We believe this necessitates the development of a specific methodology, a specific way of doing research. Although we have no doubts about the value of scientific research a lot of research has no impact on policing, even in some cases where it is evident

that it should have consequences for our operations. The aim of this third chair is to further strengthen productive relations between science and policing, especially with regard to concrete police operations.

### **Blind spots and science: Juxta**

Apart from these structural relations with science it is sometimes necessary to come up with derailing initiatives that make critical reflection unavoidable. One of these initiatives was mend to strengthen the countervailing power of the aforementioned Agora. We called it Juxta – derived from the word juxtaposition – and one of the participants has given a poster session on this conference today. What we did is we invited twelve young and bright academics to come and work for us for eighteen months to show us our blind spots. We selected them out of approximately three hundred candidates on the basis of a critical essay on the aforementioned vision document *The police in evolution*. We selected people with for the police unusual backgrounds, so no one had studied law, criminology or administrative science. Instead they were specialized in anthropology, media, philosophy, artificial intelligence, Arabic language and culture, experimental psychology, or art.

They had a very intensive introduction programme within the police force, they were confronted with all aspects of our organisation and work. They joined officers on the beat, participated in investigations, talked to all sections of the organisation on all levels. We gave them the explicit assignment to contradict and surprise us, to show us where we were wrong, and to annoy us. And, they lived up to their promise! The sessions with the Juxta's – as we lovingly called them – were always intense and I constantly had to fight the urge to defend myself. It led to new perspectives and in the end also to twelve thought provoking end products.

Their influence was not limited to the top of the organisation. We made sure that everybody in the force knew what Juxta was about, and people in the force were very interested in the concept and of course in the insights of the Juxta's. Various Juxta's had considerable influence on diverse issues as neighbourhood policing, integrity policy or the use of specific information in dealing with victims. They opened up a hotline every officer in the force could phone when he or she had a 'wicked problem', a lot of people called and where without exception im-

pressed by the contribution of the Juxta's. It further strengthened the idea that science and police work are a happy marriage and that it pays to let outsiders take a look in your organisation. But most importantly, to quote Oliver Wendell Holmes, "a mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions". Although we did not intend to recruit people for more than their project, more than half of the Juxta's currently work in our police force on regular positions.

And although Juxta was a one-time project, the – what could be called – spirit of Juxta has not disappeared. Research and critical reflection has proliferated in the force, for example with regard to the aforementioned strategic themes. Explorations on these themes are done by teams made up from diverse people within the force who seek explicit interaction with 'outsiders' from the scientific community or elsewhere.

### **What have we learned?**

What have we learned from Juxta? That we do have blind spots, that indeed it is important to focus on future oriented police themes and that even if you do so, you still run the risk of lagging behind. We also learned how important it is to bring in new and diverse perspectives, and that important issues are mostly complex issues, and that you need to combine research with 'learning by doing'. But perhaps most importantly, we learned how fruitful it is when people dare to speak up, when they tell you how it is because they have thought about it, read about it, and studied it intensively. On some sensitive subjects the Juxta's ran into a lot of opposition, but they stayed loyal to their intention to show it how it is from the perspective of an outsider and scientist. Sometimes this called for considerable commitment and courage, but in the end none of them regretted the investment.

### **An urgent appeal**

This brings me an appeal I would like to make to police officers and scientists. As should be clear from my expose, science is of crucial importance for current and future policing and senior and chief police officers are advised to facilitate the strengthening of the relation with science in every way they can. Be brave, and do not worry the truth will hurt you. For the relation to be productive, however, scientist should also be willing to stand for what they believe. In a world of all important images and

fast changing hypotheses scientist should be willing to defend forcefully the outcomes of their research, both within the police force but also in the public debate. Of course I am aware that in post modern times the scientific truth has become illusive, and that scientists have the disposition to question the validity of their own findings, that most of the time they are very hesitant to issue policy recommendations. The problem is however, if they do not do it, who will? And I am of the opinion that, although the scientific truth has become illusive, nonsense is still nonsense. If you are in science and run into nonsensical policies: please take a stand and speak up! A brave police deserves courageous scientists.



## REPORT ON THE 2009 CEPOL RESEARCH AND SCIENCE CONFERENCE BADHOEVEDORP, THE NETHERLANDS, 18-20 NOVEMBER 2009

By

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The European Police College organized its seventh annual Police Research and Science Conference on 18-20 November 2009 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The conference was organized by the Police Academy of The Netherlands in close co-operation with Austria, Germany and CEPOL's Research and Science Working Group. The title of the conference was 'Future Policing in Europe: A Shared Agenda for Research'. Around 75 police researchers, trainers, practitioners and policy-makers discussed several dimensions concerning the challenges faced by police forces across Europe.

The challenges include several dimensions. A first dimension concerns organizational issues, such as technological innovation, risk-management, diversity in and around police forces, multi-disciplinary co-operation with other partners, intelligence-led policing, and selection and recruitment. Another important strand concerns the challenges in crime and disorder, such as cyber-crime, radicalization, and external security deficits. Finally, the conference dealt with the European dimension of policing, police training and police research.

The topic 'Future Policing in Europe' was approached from an academic as well as a practical angle. Under the guidance of several moderators, the conference activity worked with several modes of presentation and interaction, including plenary speeches, mini-seminars, poster sessions and a panel discussion. This mix of conference modes aimed at involving all participants to a maximum extent and at alternating their role of speaker, listener and debater. The conference organizers made an effort to invite a balanced representation of male and female speakers, mature and promising new researchers, and attendees from several European Member States.

The objectives of the conference activity included: 1) providing support to police by research, science and an academic approach; 2) exploring expectations and possibilities for comparative research efforts in a European perspective; 3) strengthening the networking processes between police science and police practice; 4) consolidating the integration of research and police education; and 5) encouraging the exchange of knowledge between the security field and police research. The final objective was to reflect on the consequences of innovation and policing reforms.