A European quality assurance system for police education: a challenge for CEPOL?

Sofie De Kimpe
Belgium

Abstract:

In international police literature there exists a long-standing debate about the role and function of police education in the professionalisation of the police. The discussion revolves around the role of police education as an engine of socialisation. Some say that police training has a limited impact on the police profession, while stating that police officers mostly learn their profession on the streets and not at the police school. Others argue that police education can be an engine of change for the police organisation. In this outline of a presentation given at the CEPOL Research and Science Conference in Budapest (5 October 2016), we stipulate that police training can play a major role in the process of the socialisation of the police profession, but to do so the police education system has to seek more alignment with the (European) higher education system. We argue ([1]), inspired by the work of Janet Chan (J. Chan, Devery and Doran, 2003), that police education should be an agent of change within the police organisation system. We believe that if the police service wants to be 'in tune with society' — and to be able to react to societal change — the police education system should reflect more upon the (European) regular education system. Moreover, police education has to strengthen its position and status in the European market of higher education by ensuring high quality standards. We suggest doing this by including more pedagogical research and expertise in the police education and training system guidelines and standards of the European quality assurance system. In our opinion, the key must be sought in the implementation of a European quality assurance system for police education in Europe. In this a crucial role could be provided for CEPOL as a possible European quality assurance agency for higher police education ([2]).

Keywords: European police education system; accreditation; socialisation; European education system; police education.

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[1] For more information about underlying assumptions and sources for this argument we refer to former publications (De Kimpe and Demarée, 2011).

[2] This paper encompasses a presentation given at the CEPOL Research and Science Conference on 5 October 2016. The main objective of this conference paper is not to make a scientific contribution to the world of police studies, but rather to launch a debate on the European police education system. This paper can only be read and evaluated in this way, that it seeks to launch a debate about the future quality policy of the European police education programmes.

'Forget everything you learned at the police school; from now on you will learn what police work is all about…' This notorious quote, often heard by police recruits from their mentor when entering the streets on their first day in the field, refers to the assumption that 'socialisation' [3] in the police organisation primarily takes place in the field, rather than in the classroom of the police school or during the process of training and education.

Although the police organisation has high expectations of the effects of police education and training, the role of education as an instrument of socialisation is still strongly debated and questioned. In this debate, we distinguish two opinions. **A first group of authors** questions the primarily role of training and education and argues that socialisation within the police profession mainly takes place after the training and education. International literature researching the development of the police officer during and after the police training outlines a pessimistic picture of the (long-term) impact of training and education on police officers. They portray a rather weak relationship between the training arrangements of the police organisation and the further development of the (attitudes of) police officers during their first years raised on site (Alain, 2011; J. Chan et al., 2003; Forslin and Mägiste, 1978; Garner, 2005; Haarr, 2001; Monjardet and Gorgeon, 2005; Nieuwkamp, Kouwenhoven and Krommendijk, 2007; Skogan and Frydl, 2004). The famous cliché is that once the recruits are on site they experience a 'reality shock' (Bennett, 1984, p. 52) and are confronted with the limits of the 'idealistic' training. Moreover, during their first time on the streets they meet the complex daily reality of police work, which is characterised by a considerable administrative burden, frustration, uncertainty, moments of stress and of boredom, and face abruptly emotionally charged situations and interactions in the less attractive echelons of society. The novice agents learn to say quickly that the everyday police reality is not black and white, even that it is quite complex (Foster, 2003). The insignificant impact of police training and education as an informal source of socialisation is thereby often symbolised by the 'gap' that exists between training arrangements and the daily work reality.

Although we can assume that the necessary competences are developed during the process of social learning (read the socialisation process), research stipulates that they are thrown overboard very quickly upon entering the streets. This might be explained by the fact that the development of new competences does not correspond enough with what happens on the streets. We might even assume that police students are not resistant enough to the traditions of the field. This means that newcomers would essentially conform more to the traditional police culture that dominates the field than, for example, the vision of community policing which is taught during their training.

On the other hand, we also read that some studies cite this perspective and the educational background as an important source of socialisation, especially in terms of attitudes such as controlling violence, knowledge of society, discipline, etc.

The truth may lie in the middle. Nevertheless, both opinions show that the process of socialisation undergone by police recruits is not always in line with what is formally 'expected', which evokes the supposed driving role of police training and education in organisational change. Despite the increased efforts in Belgium and other European countries to turn their police education organisations into modern, knowledge-led organisations, there remains considerable disagreement as to the impact of police training as a motor for change in the police organisation. By this we suggest that although socialisation might occur during training and education, it does not necessarily generate the right competences, meaning the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to manage and solve current societal problems. Moreover, training needs — much more so than today — to be an engine of change in the evolution of the police organisation towards an organisation 'in tune with society'.

For a more detailed description and analysis of the problem of socialisation in the police education system we refer to former publications (De Kimpe, 2009; De Kimpe, 2014; De Kimpe and Bloeyaert, 2015; De Kimpe and Demarée, 2011; De Kimpe, Gunther Moor, Vlek and Van Reenen, 2012). In this paper we want to point out three possible alterations to police education policy. These requests for change require innovative thinking about police education, but most of all they demand

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[3] The process of socialisation takes place within an organisation. During this process individuals adopt values, norms, roles, expectations, etc. so they can function properly in the organisation and be part of it. It includes also the adoption of the various forms of cultural knowledge or codes, including assumptions, values, meanings, world views and expectations or standards for acceptable behaviour patterns in the organisation. According to Chan, Devery and Doran (2003:3) socialisation is 'the process through which a novice learns the skills, knowledge and values necessary to become a member'.

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more willingness to open up the police education system. This appeal in favour of a more open and more highly qualified European education system is based on Chan's (Janet Chan, 1996; J. Chan et al., 2003) vision of the role and function of police education. She believes police education can be a motor for change for the police organisation, but it needs a cultural and structural shift whereby we need to work on the 'habitus' and the 'field' of the police education system.

We introduce three points of innovation.

1. We need to bring in more pedagogical science and expertise in the process of police training and education.
2. We need more 'education' and less 'police' in police education organisations.
3. We need to implement a more stringent European education and quality policy within the European police education area.

First, we plead for **more pedagogical research on the process of police education.** Although a lot of research on police education has been conducted, little is known about the impact of police education systems on knowledge transfer. In traditional research on police education, researchers have tended to focus on the question of whether police students adopt professional competences during the process of training and education. But little research has been able to grasp what is going on during this educational process. Moreover, we have little information on 'how' and 'if' knowledge transfer takes place. Longitudinal research before and after training and education measures shifts in attitudes, knowledge and skills, but we do not seem to be able to explain what causes this change in the development of competences. In this, the police education process remains a black box. We have little knowledge of the influence of peers and teachers (role models) in classrooms, the impact of the hidden curriculum, the school culture, the content of the lessons and courses, the evaluation of recruits and the illumination of non-potential recruits. As an example, De Schrijver (2014) stipulates in her research on the development of ethical competences during police training and education that training and education have limited impact on the development of the ethical competences of police students. Although ethical training was on the programme, ethical rules were taught in the classroom and dilemma trainings took place 'on the floor'. But in her doctoral thesis she cannot clarify what caused this minor shift in ethical competence development, nor can she explain if this shift was caused during the police education programme. We need more scientific, pedagogical insights into the role and function of education and training at the police school. This knowledge can help us to understand and augment knowledge transfer during the process of police training and education.

This brings us to our **second** proposition: we need more 'education' and less 'police' in police education organisations. We can do this in the first place by **bringing more pedagogical skills and expertise into police education organisations.** Police education remains mainly vocational training, steered and nurtured by the experience of the blue-coated worker. Nevertheless, the quality of education stands or falls with the quality of its teachers. We might assume police officers have great pedagogical talents, skills and passions, but this does not disprove the need for more pedagogical training and expertise on the part of staff. In addition to this, police schools might consider hiring more external teaching staff, giving an external vison on police education subjects. Above all, not everything taught at the police school demands experience with police practice.

In the second place we can open up police education organisations by seeking more structural and formal alliances and cooperation with the institutions and organisations of the European higher education system, like universities, university colleges and technical universities. Despite changes to and innovation in the police education system in many European countries, police training is still an exclusive police matter. In a lot of European countries training and education takes place at police schools, far away from cities and society, sometimes between the high walls of ancient, majestic buildings.

Although police education systems and programmes are very different from country to country, police education systems are often characterised as a formal, collective, sequential, fixed, serial arrangement, and are particularly attentive to the 'divestiture' of recruits (De Kimpe and Demarée, 2011). The students are trained in cohorts; the programme proceeds as a function of the discipline and the increase in compliance, and as a function of the fitting of a new status or identity for recruits (which implies that the old one is deleted). Moreover, the socialisation process takes place within

a tight time frame. Police training is often organised so that it consists of several stages that recruits have to wade through to achieve the final goal — the appearance of the individual in the organisation (Chan et al., 2003; Fielding, 1988). In short, the police organisation and the manner in which new entrants join the organisation are typified by Fielding (1988:16) as 'closed socialisation'. Bloeyaert (2002, p. 505) summarises the socialisation of the Belgian prospective agents together as a 'mono-organisational matter.'

Next to this, the steering and financing of police education is based on a corporate management **logic** and not on a pedagogical or educational one. The main idea is that recruits need to be as fast as possible on the field, and training and education should be based on experience, which can only be found 'in' the police organisation. The flipside of this coin is that, in times of financial crisis and economic restraints, police management tends to treat police education rather shabbily, meaning not as a core business. For this reason, the police education budget is always the first target of austerity measures. The fastest way to save money is by shortening police education programmes. From a corporate management perspective, investing in the quality of education is not rewarding.

The treaty of Bologna and Copenhagen can be a source of inspiration in steering the police education system towards a more liberal open market for higher education. This may mean loosening the sometimes rigorous chains between national police education institutions and their national police education management.

This brings me to my third and final aspiration: the need for a European agency for accreditation of police study programmes in European countries. This idea is not new. We can find a similar example in the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA; http://www.eapaa.eu). This accreditation association is a well-known and respectable organisation, providing quality assurance for public administration programmes since 1999. In this, the idea of a police education accreditation agency should not be considered as idealistic or utopian. The overall aim of installing a police education accreditation agency is twofold.

1. Improving and assuring the quality of police education programmes in European countries.

2. Stimulating the liberalisation of a police education area in Europe, in order to (a) increase the quality of police education programmes, (b) increase the exchange of knowledge of and expertise on the police profession and (c) intensify the mobilisation of students and teaching staff between the different national police education systems.

The first task of this agency would be to develop appropriate accreditation criteria and standards for European police education programmes, and this on the different levels of European education framework (master's and bachelor's degrees, but also vocational training). This would allow the accreditation agency to evaluate all police education programmes with the same quality assurance standards. It would also increase transparency and accountability in the provision of European police education programmes. Today it has to be said that police education programmes — measured by different national quality standards and accreditation systems — are sometimes unequal in content and quality. This creates suspicion and doubt regarding certain police education programmes. Usually, but not always, this is fed by institutions and programmes of regular higher education institutions, who describe these programmes as low-level or non-scientific education. Accreditation could provide clarity in this by giving police education programmes the same status as programmes accredited in the European higher education system. Furthermore, accreditation recognition can increase the mobility of staff and students as it makes programmes in different countries more comparable or even creates more convergence, and in this it can also strengthen the European police education system as a whole. This qualification framework should be in alliance with the framework of qualification for the European Higher Education Area, which is an opportunity to build more overall societal competences into police education programmes and cooperation with institutions of higher education. We can do this by injecting more societal learning outcomes and quality standards into the police qualification framework, for example by demanding that police research expertise be implemented in the programmes.

Secondly, this agency should provide a system of external evaluation of European study programmes in the domain of policing and police science.

How would this external evaluation procedure work? Every police institution could voluntary apply for accreditation of a police programme with the agency, which would then begin a procedure. This procedure would consist of (a) the writing of a self-evaluation report and (b) an on-site visit by a visitation expert panel consisting of police professionals, academic scholars with expertise in the domain of policing and experts in pedagogical science or who are familiar with education. The members would not work for/with nor have any connection to the institution requesting accreditation. (c) After the on-site visit, a final evaluation report would be written. In this report would be mentioned whether the programme meets the generally accepted quality criteria as defined in the accreditation standards developed by the accreditation agency. The output of this external evaluation would be a report containing qualitative feedback on the programme. This would stimulate and help programmes to reach higher levels of teaching and improve their quality. Moreover, police institutions that want to gain an accreditation for their programmes would be encouraged to invest in the quality criteria and the education level of their programme. In this way accreditation can also encourage curriculum development and innovation in the overall police education system. At the end of the accreditation process the programme would be rewarded with an accreditation label, a quality seal meaning that they meet the European quality standards. This could augment the credibility of the police education system in higher education institutions (universities and university colleges) and therefore give more credit and status to police education institutions. This accreditation procedure would not have to be in contravention with national accreditation procedures. The EAPAA organisation has also worked out a solution for this problem by concluding protocols and working out cooperation strategies with national accreditation agencies.

Finally, we need a credible, objective, neutral organisation able to fulfil the role of the accreditation agency. I believe CEPOL can be this mother organisation. Within its walls it needs to constitute a bureau that organises and manages the process of accreditation, composes the external visitation panels and grants the accreditation. The constitution of the external panels is crucial in a visitation process, which means that the organisation should be able to rely on a strong and valid network of academic scholars and police professionals.

To conclude, if we want to reinforce the role and the function of police training in the socialisation of police officers into the police organisation we need to open up the black box of the educational process so better knowledge transfer can take place. In addition to this we need to improve the quality of police study programmes by submitting police education programmes to a decent quality assurance measurement. Approved programmes will gain more status and institutions will be stimulated to invest in their quality. This increase in status also demands more societal influence on police programmes and the control of these programmes. This can be done through an accreditation system set up by a neutral and credible European accreditation agency. CEPOL could take the lead in this. This European organisation can bring the national police education partners and the academic police scholars together at the table, as it does in the 'Research and Science' conference. CEPOL has the partners, the understanding and the power from the European Commission to do this. To conclude, in the same way as the higher education system needed Bologna to innovate and change the European Higher Education Area, the European police education area needs CEPOL to implement a professional European police education area.

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