European police science: connecting practice, education and research

Monica den Boer
The Netherlands

(2012 Conference in Lyon)

The value of knowledge and research in police organisations ([1])

Police organisations are traditionally rather 'narrative' in nature, to the extent that experience and knowledge is often transferred through individual stories (Trujillo & Dionosopoulos, 1987; Waddington, 1999: 288; Wilson, 2000; Vlek, 2012) ([2]). The legendary coffee break functions as a bridge between the individual and the collective. It helps to understand and to frame experiences at work. A narrative organisation also implies that practical wisdom remains pocketed in corners of the police organisations and that they are not disseminated. The institutionalisation of police knowledge helps to transform wisdom beyond the subjective level, and it allows for a more systematic transfer of knowledge between individual professionals, organisations, agencies and nations.

However, noble as this strategy may sound, the relationship between the police organisation, police education and police research does not occur to be a straightforward one. Why would this be? There may be several reasons, most of which have adopted the status of perpetual myths. It is often claimed that police officers don't read, and if they read, they are either forced to do so or they take recourse to light and short reading material. It is also claimed that police officers are generally defensive and that they are not interested in the outcome of research. In addition, police organisations are regarded as introverted bureaucracies that are unwilling to critically reflect on their own organisation. Police can be extremely unreceptive of research, which may be due to the fact that many police officers have no experience with research. Vice versa, it is often claimed that police researchers have no practical experience with, and appreciation of, genuine police work. Hence, the question is very much whether there is a gap between police practice, education and research, and if so, how it can be addressed or resolved. This article seeks to contribute to the discussion about the future of European police research in connection with practice and education.

Police research is key to policing

There is a clear need to link research and higher education in the European Area of Policing. Police agencies are learning organisations which face a growing complexity. In their security environments, police organisations witness a rapid development of technology and surveillance. At the same time, society is changing to the extent that traditional mechanisms of social control have eroded. Police agencies are public services organisations whose performance is under the continuous gaze of society and media. Police professionals often engage in a specialist activity

---

but remain potentially exposed to extremely diverse circumstances in which they are requested to respond flexibly and intelligently. In order to maintain high levels of professionalism, police organisations have to build and share knowledge. Police research helps to develop police organisations and practices, by offering accrued data and analysis on trends and developments in law, politics, society and technology. Moreover, police organisations can look into the mirror more easily when they enlarge their comparative insight into national and international systems of policing.

They have to adapt to new circumstances, which may even involve profound transformations in terms of governance, legal framework, authority and accountability. The rapid globalisation and the vast expansion of the private security market demands from public police organisations that they engage in multi-agency cooperation. While public police lose their monopoly and face more competition, they are pressed to show their strength and added value. Moreover, austerity measures may lead to insufficient capacity and underinvestment in specialist resources. The changing economy of policing which results from this multi-faceted context leads to new accountability and governance arrangements.

Hence, new demands are placed upon police organisations, for instance in the sphere of strategic problem-solving. This would be the worst time to cut down on investment in higher police education and research as there is a need for academically trained police professionals with skills, competencies and knowledge to coordinate offer strategic advice to police leadership. The delivery of informed judgement is a crucial task for highly educated police professionals. Hence, we find ourselves in a situation where life-long learning demands on police professionals have to be combined with the Bologna requirements, which are currently not yet achievable in every EU Member State.

Police research is key to police education

Police research is not merely relevant for police agencies and their partner organisations, but principally also to police knowledge and police education. Through the application of rigid methodological and theoretical frameworks, police research may contribute to the valorisation of police practices. Moreover, by means of codification and building a canon of police, knowledge can be more systematically transferred between individuals and organisations, and it can be more evenly distributed and disseminated, ensuring the access to knowledge by all police individuals. Police research can help to bring forward police education through curricular development and the development of educational materials. In the past, police research has already helped tremendously to bring police training and education on a higher plane. Furthermore, police researchers who are active in police educational environments can provide teaching, supervision and assessment and they may provide an active input to accreditation processes. Police students may be able to learn more in a research-orientated environment as they are challenged to address questions for which no ready answer has yet been provided. A research-driven environment tickles their curiosity and prompts them to engage in an intellectually stimulating debate, culminating in research-based analysis of police-related issues. The following quotation is particularly instructive in this regard:

'All students have a right to learn in an environment that provides the opportunity to fully develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. A learning environment informed by research provides learners with an understanding of knowledge creation (the research process and research methods) and its application (in economic, social, health and global contexts). It also stimulates key skills of critical analysis, respect for evidence and informed decision-making. We feel that a research-informed environment to stimulate the development of knowledge and skills is appropriate to all levels of student learning in higher education. (TQEF, 2006-2009; HEFCE, 2006).'

A research-informed environment is thus seen as a stimulation of the development of knowledge and skills at all levels of student learning in higher education. Police research in an international-comparative environment presents a particular logistic, cultural and linguistic challenge, but this may be overcome when it is combined with e-learning and e-discussion platforms (virtual learning environments).

Police research is an ongoing practice

The text above seems to suggest that we currently do not have an international infrastructure for the systematic linkage between police practice, (higher) education and research. In part, this may be true, as there is currently no integrated accredited Master in Policing or a PhD-programme in the European Union. However, there are sustainable forms of cooperation between police organisations, police academies and universities, even on an international level. The current infrastructure is still primarily national and mono-sectoral, to the extent that different security organisations (e.g. police, customs, special investigators, border officials, prosecution agencies) don't mingle very well. Hence, several programmes remain limited to police participants only. The CEPOL Police Exchange Programme (³) offers a promising perspective for reciprocal police knowledge exchange as it allows police officers to spend some weeks in a foreign police force. The European Police Exchange Programme seeks to contribute to mobility and exchange of police professionals, to establish a common police knowledge across different fields of interest, to facilitate the sharing of good practices at EU level, to contribute to the sharing of a European police identity and to encourage mutual learning and networking. Research experts may also be eligible to take part in the European Police Exchange Programme, for instance when they are active in fields like community policing, radicalisation, financial crime and the management of major events. CEPOL's liaison programme aims at closer cooperation with European agencies, which is currently done through study visits (e.g. Europol, OLAF etc.)

Throughout Europe, there appears to be considerable variety in police higher education (see e.g. Pagon et al. 1996), as well as the possibility for police officers to enter a PhD-Programme. The Police Academy of the Netherlands runs a PhD-programme on police research, which allows professionals from a different academic background the possibility to conduct a multi-annual research project under the supervision of a lecturer from the Police Academy in cooperation with a university professor. The Scottish Institute of Policing Research (SIPR) (⁴) offers different academic trajectories, ranging from MSc theses, to PhD positions, practitioner fellowships and post-doctoral research. In Australia, the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) (⁵) opens its doors for academically involved police practitioners (called 'pracademics' or 'embedded cops'), who are highly qualified and who act as ambassadors for the linkage between the academic community and the police organisation. The 'embedded (research) cop' is involved in research activities on a day-to-day basis within a university environment.

It is generally considered essential to gradually build a cohort of 'pracademics' in order to stimulate systematic exchange of knowledge about procedural, methodological and thematic issues. Another model of practitioner involvement in police research is provided by internships for academics within police organisations and police academies; they can be involved in performing research as well as teaching. Weisburd and Neyroud (2011: 1) advocate a model which brings universities into police centres and which encourages the police to take ownership of research. Yet another but complementary model is the establishment of fellowships for practitioners at police and security academies, which allows professionals with an academic background to dedicate research time to a specific issue. Furthermore, in order to stimulate research participation from police agencies, some Member States have institutionalised a grant competition (e.g. SIPR and the Dutch Commissie Politie en Wetenschap). More generally, it is considered essential to nourish a lively interaction between practitioners and the research community. This can also be done by connecting Master's of Science in Policing students more closely with the community of Police PhD-scholars, for instance along the lines of graduate schools, which can stimulate mutual learning. Although there is currently a strong move within the academic world to establish graduate

---

(³) See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/pdf/expro_faq_s_en.pdf; accessed 18 December 2012.

(⁴) See http://www.sipr.ac.uk/research/index.php; accessed 19 December 2012.

(⁵) See http://www.ceps.edu.au/home; accessed 19 December 2012.

schools ([6]), within the police environment they seem less evident as there is growing evidence of a decrease of educational requirements for frontline officers. In any case, there is an obvious need to link research and higher education more closely, and this does not merely require to train the trainers, but also to actively build a stimulating environment for teachers at police academies to acquire an academic degree or PhD if they have not done so already. These initiatives have to be supported by visionary and strong academic leadership at the police academies. Efforts to build a feasible and internationally vibrant community of police scholars also require the expansion of nodes of cooperation and exchange. This can be developed on a European scale but can even 'go global' by means of EU-partnership programmes (ENP).

Police research is about delivery and diversity

At the moment, police research is incredibly diverse as it is performed by a wide variety of scholars, ranging from university professors to Master's students who conduct a research project for the purpose of their thesis. The leading principle is that intellectual rigour should not be compromised, and that theoretical and methodological requirements should always be complied with. Research ethics play an important role in all academic undertakings, but within the police research environment it may even take a more prominent position given the often sensitive nature of the research projects and the privileged access of police researchers to confidential data ([7]).

Except for aiming at a better understanding of policing through appreciative inquiry and how policing can be improved, innovative police scholarship can contribute to de-mystification and a testing of academic insights. In this context, the emphasis lies strongly on the validation and valorisation of existing

police knowledge. Police research can be supported by an interdisciplinary approach, with a balanced mix of legal, sociological, economic and psychological perspectives. Cross-disciplinary research may literally be able to cross borders with a focus on police science. In a diverse police research environment, multiple research projects should be welcomed, ranging from policy-orientated to theory-based, and from short-term to longitudinal research projects. There is a need for more empirical field research, which may generate inside perspectives.

What are additional conditions for building a relevant research-based body of knowledge? Police organisations demand the production of 'usable stuff', which generates the need for practical applications, for instance through evidence-based research. Neyroud and Weisburd (2011: 3) argue that the evidence-based model for developing practices and policies has not (yet) been developed widely by police agencies. Arguments and recommendations can be evidence-based but still not be adopted because policing is a very politicised field of activity. Neyroud and Weisburd also argue that vice versa, policing strategies are implemented with little reference to research evidence. Hence, despite attempts to overcome this gap, there are considerable challenges to interlink research and policing in a more systematic fashion. In other sectors, like industry, medicine or nursing, research enjoys a much higher priority and more budget is reserved for this purpose. The findings of police research should be disseminated not merely in the form of books and journals, but also directly by means of communication in class as well as by Internet and social media. Research findings may need to be translated in a language which is fit for certain audiences. The minimum objective should be to trigger attention, interaction and discussion about the research findings, also (and most importantly) with a wider community of citizens.

What should the future focus of police research be? The map of police research projects already looks incredibly rich and diverse. Several areas of interest have been charted, certainly within the higher police education environment. These topics include the history of policing, cybercrime, bio-terrorism, trafficking in human beings, forensics, cross-border policing, ethics and human rights. However, higher police education (graduate schools, Master's and

---

([6]) See for instance the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security, which includes programmes for doctor of police leadership, doctor of policing and security, several Master programmes, graduate diplomas as well as a bachelor programme; http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/arts/agsps/courses; accessed 19 December 2012.

([7]) See for instance Maurice Punch, `Police and Ethics in Qualitative Research`, http://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/867fall08/867pdfs/handbook_83-104.pdf; accessed 20 December 2012

Bachelor's programmes) could be supported more systematically and directly by an international community of policing scholars. As for international policing, more comparative research [8] is required which is transferred into police educational material and more research with a focus on cross-border policing practices in Europe could be undertaken as well (e.g. Spapens, 2010). Relatively uncharted police research areas include police-media relations (however, see e.g. Denef et al., 2011); the ergonomics of new police technologies; the ways in which precautionary policing is undertaken, e.g. by means of pro-active surveillance powers; the emergence of hybrid policing, e.g. blurring police and military mandates and the shift to paramilitary policing (Easton et al. 2010); public and private policing (privatisation); intelligence-led policing applications in the realms of public order management; and equity of policing (the distribution and delivery of public policing services across the EU).

Police research requires investment from a variety of partners, such as police academies and police agencies, security and industry partners, governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations. Between these partners and stakeholders, trustworthy and sustainable relationships need to be established. To allow police research to flourish, it requires nutrition from academic leadership. Academic support and sound facilities for international police research could become a focus of all national police academies in the EU Member States. In order to facilitate academic access and mutual learning it is adamant that — in addition to the library facilities in police academies — a European-wide digital repository for (international) police research is available, which involves input from the wider community of police scholars and which should take an inclusive approach. Also junior scholars such as Master's students and PhD students should be invited to take part in a digital academic environment, once their academic output has been screened and formally approved. Except for the investment in horizontal and multilateral forms of research cooperation, there could also be an EU-wide investment in international police partnerships.

Research findings should not remain hidden from the educational community: bridges can be constructed by inviting academic scholars to share their findings and experiences in intensive police research seminars, for instance in the form of summer schools. Moreover, on a European scale, competitions may be launched for individual and institutional police research grants. These undertakings should be assisted and coordinated by a (virtual) support office for international police research projects. Whilst keeping an open mind for a diversity of research topics, an EU police research strategy could become part of the successor to the Stockholm Programme and could be aligned with the shaping and implementation of the EU policy cycle on serious and organised crime [9].

Concluding notes

Police research may contribute to innovative solutions that are more cost effective and efficient. Furthermore, police research facilitates quick strategic advice and responses from police leaders, as they have access to readily available data, e.g. on crime statistics and patterns. Police research may also contribute to the standardisation and uniformity of practices across a jurisdiction; this may avoid fragmentation and enhances equity of justice. Above, it has been argued that there is a need for quick results as well as longitudinal research. In order to establish an academic environment of sharing and pooling, police researchers ought to be encouraged to share and communicate their findings before data are published in peer-reviewed environments. The sharing of research findings is very important, which gives a key role to libraries and virtual learning centres. In the field of police research, there is a need for role models. In this light, it is encouraging that an increasing number of police chiefs have acquired an academic degree and an understanding of the academic rationale. Principally, police research provides the basis for a rational choice concerning future options for the development of police services.

Despite the high relevance of police research for police organisations, academic environments should

---

[8] However, see COMPOSITE: Comparative Police Studies in the EU; http://www.rsm.nl/about-rsm/news/detail/2741-composite-comparative-police-studies-in-the-eu/; accessed 20 December 2012.

[9] Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on the creation and implementation of a EU policy cycle for organised and serious crime, 3034d Justice and Home Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 8 and 9 November 2010.

be maximally alert about the potentially dramatic impact of austerity measures and budget cuts within the Member States. Police research cooperation in the EU, with a rigid emphasis on shared learning and innovation, is a promising way to join efforts and to keep abreast of budget cuts which could potentially undermine and destroy a cautiously built research infrastructure. In order to achieve this, it is important that police researchers think hard about a European-wide alignment between the academic research agenda and the policy agenda. This may lead to sustainable commitment at the European level: a collaborative effort focused on strategy, finance and management may help to transform competitive agendas into cooperative ones. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to overcome logistic, linguistic and cultural thresholds. Whilst academic neutrality may be an illusion in the face of the power of governments who are really in charge, it is vital to pursue integrity and independence in using the evidence when performing police research. This is why some scholars would prefer police research to be conducted in an academic environment. However, confident and well-networked police academies that have institutionalised partnerships with universities may well be capable of nourishing and producing high-quality police research.

References

- Denef, S., Bayerl, P.S. & Kaptein, N. (2011). Cross-European approaches to social media as tool for police communication. European Police Science and Research Bulletin, 6 (winter), pp. 11-14.

- Easton, M., Moelker, R., den Boer, M., Vander Beken, T. & Janssens, J., (eds.), (2010) *Het Groene Gras (Blurring Military and Police Roles)*, Eleven International Publishers, The Hague.

- Graham-Matheson, L. (2010) (Ed.), Research Informed Teaching: Exploring the Concept, Canterbury Christ Church University, http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Support/learning-teaching-enhancement-unit/Documents/RIT/00-RIT-All.pdf; accessed 7 December 2012.

- Neyroud, P., and Weisburd, D. (2011), Police Science: Towards a New Paradigm, New Perspectives on Policing, National Institute of Justice, Harvard Kennedy School; http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/programs/criminal-justice/NPIP-Police %20Science-TowardaNewParadigm.pdf; accessed 7 December 2012.

- Pagon, M.; Virjent-Novak, B.; Djuric, M. & Lobnikar, B. (1996), European Systems of Police Education and Training, in *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Comparing Firsthand Knowledge with Experience from the West*, College of Police and Security Studies Slovenia; https://www.ncjrs.gov/policing/eur551.htm; accessed 19 December 2012.

- Spapens, A.C.M. (2010), 'Cross-border public order policing in the Dutch border areas', Journal of Police Studies, 2010 (3), pp. 163-179.

- Trujillo, Nick, and Dionosopoulos, George (1987), 'Cop talk, police stories, and the social construction of organizational drama', in Central States Speech Journal, Volume 38, Issues 3-4, pp. 196-209.

- Vlek, Frits (2012), "Verbinding verbroken? (Politie)wetenschappelijke kennis en (de scholing in) politiekunde", in S. de Kimpe et.al. (Eds.), Professionalisering en socialisatie, Antwerpen/Apeldoorn/Portland, Maklu, pp. 171-198.

- Waddington, P. (1999), 'Police Canteen Sub-Culture. An Appreciation', British Journal of Criminology, Vol. 39, no 2, pp. 287-309.

- Wilson, C. P. (2000), Cop Knowledge. Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.