

The role of the Police Research Centre in strengthening criminalists' competencies and securing society

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Abstract

The multidimensional expansion of security from the state towards the individual, human security and human rights significantly determines the contemporary social role of the police as a security institution.

The adoption of the educational processes, with an accent on the need for multidimensional competencies of police professionals, actualises the question of the educational model and its compatibility with European or Croatian qualifications frameworks.

The effort to change the paradigm of 'research after learning' to 'learning through research' tries to influence the creation of academic programmes, directing the focus and adjustment of the researchers, and improve the output competencies of criminalists.

Development of the concept of integration of police practice and science-associated education content and research with practical participation in the police and criminal investigation procedure of security phenomena in real time.

This paper analyses the need for the transformation of higher police education through model integration of police practice, theory and science. The aim is to argue the reasons for the development of the Police Research Centre within the Police College, resulting in the launch of the strategic programme for its development.

Keywords: Police Research Centre; police practice and science.

Introduction

Modern-day security highlights concerns over human potential because of new insecurities, threats and danger with, perhaps, increasing understanding by society overall of human values, and in particular human rights and freedom of citizens.

The development of human resources to promote safer societies and national security is a particularly important national issue for every educational, scientific and technological system.

Reflecting the theoretical underpinning of the management of resources in this field, it is clear that national security is for the public good.

It is therefore important to discuss human resource management in the public sector, especially police training.

These resources, in the narrowest sense (Marčetić, 2007) are referred to as the totality of formal knowledge, practical skills, abilities, behaviours, social characteristics, psychological characteristics and other skills of public servants, as the most significant group of people in the public sector (on matters of public inter-

est). The multidimensional and multidirectional expansion of state security towards the individual, human security and human rights significantly determines the contemporary social role of the police as a security institution. Police educational systems are determined by internal policies, along with the need to develop human resources in order to achieve the fundamental societal role of the police and compliance with the legal scope of police duties and powers (The Police Act, 2011, 2012, 2014 and The Police Duties and Powers Act, 2009, 2014).

In particular, it relates to basic police education, training, specialisation and professional development. However, higher police education is also influenced by wider academic fields, empirical work and societies' expectations concerning leadership, ethics and fairness. Thus, these influences upon higher police training are broader in scope than merely the policy and legal frameworks that might otherwise apply.

Therefore, the design of educational processes, with an emphasis on the need for multidisciplinary competence of police and crime professionals, raises a question concerning their compatibility with the Croatian qualifications framework, with reference to the European qualifications framework and European educational standards and programme.

Consequently, based on the analysis of the situation and possibilities, this points to the need to upgrade the higher police education system, involving a central role for the Police Research Centre joining forces with other functional areas of the Police College.

Lifelong learning

In view of the police service as a career category and assuming the need for overall lifelong professional engagement of the individual, the ongoing professional educational system is an extremely important feature of the Strategy of Education Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia. Education itself might be viewed as extending only to organised learning, whilst learning is a broader concept that should include less formal, unintentional, unorganised and spontaneous acquisition of knowledge and skills and can be carried for a lifetime. Lifelong education refers to all ac-

tivities of gaining knowledge, skills, attitudes and values throughout a lifetime with aim of endorsement and expansion within a framework of personal, social or professional development and individual practice. Lifelong learning can be viewed as a base for personal development and managing the constant adjustment of the individual in a changing environment in one's personal life, at the work place and in society (Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, 2011). These linked development and education systems are socially important processes of career development and gaining new knowledge and skills by, inter alia, staff training that results in preparation for professional practice and the acquisition of specific skills required by the organisation (Buble, 2006).

The dynamics of policing subjects — starting from the individual and extending to public safety and criminology through to organising, recruiting and other aspects of police management, international corporation and the training of officers — demand the continual adjustment and development of the educational context, methodology and objectives. At the same time there is a recognition of the responsibility of the individual and self-initiative and awareness and the formal-informal elements of education.

Within European reform guidelines for education it is suggested that there is a need for the development of new transparent systems of employment within the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia (Mol) and for progression through the ranks and specialist roles in the police service due to the fact that all modern police forces are organised as structured and hierarchical services (Mol, Police education reform, 2014). The reform of police education is important from, inter alia, the point of view of police culture, which influences the reaction of police officers to pressure and conflicts in their job that might be characterised as social isolation, conservatism, suspicion and highlighted internal solidarity.

Police and criminalist education must understand the educational context of a wide scientific spectre, but it also demands in-depth specialisation, continuous professional development and specialist training. In that context questions arise regarding when and to what level scientific methods should be implemented and what place police science has.

Safety as a subject of police science and criminalistics

Whilst a preliminary view of the police might characterise them as action centred and organisational, a more enlightened perspective would recognise policing in the context of police science (Butorac and Solomun, 2013), which consists of a wide body of knowledge impacting on police practice that is shared with criminology, law, criminalistics, other forensic sciences, sociology, psychology, management, safety, political and other academic disciplines. It may be a widely accepted opinion that police science is primarily concerned with safety or public safety phenomena according to which we can simply name it 'science of safety'. (Porada, et al., 2006:17, according to Erneker and Holcr, 1997). According to criteria for determining public safety from internal and external perspectives, police science from an internal point of view is considered an integral part of the wider concept of police and legal science, which involves the investigation of threats, danger, disruption of public peace and order, life and property of citizens, prevention, discovering, processing, sanctioning, etc. External aspects of police science involve numerous aspects of international police corporation, whether it is within the framework of the EU integration (Europol, CEPOL, Frontex and other) or globally, the role of police within the system of international security and establishing and maintaining (peacemaking and peacekeeping) international peace and safety under the umbrella of the UN, NATO, bilateral and multilateral police arrangements, etc. The presence of police science in all aspects of safety undoubtedly confirms the police as the cornerstone of the modern system of national security, despite opinions (Tatalović and Bilandžić, 2005), that exclude the police and dispute their obvious role in the system of national security.

Following trends within higher police education, science and research, especially through CEPOL (the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training) programmes it seems justified to orient the subject of police science in Croatia towards the EU context.

The framework programme of the EU for research and innovation (Horizon 2020, 2013) is a three-dimensional programme, including financial priorities, which focuses on social challenges. In Chapter 7 (Secure society: Protection of freedom and safety of Europe and its citizens), referring to the sub-chapter on safety, this highlights that Europe is confronted by large socioeconom-

ic challenges, such as growing economic and cultural interdependence, ageing population growth, social exclusion and poverty, inequality, migration flow, closing of the digital gap, etc. This causes many forms of insecurity — crime, violence, terrorism, cybernetic attacks and breaches of privacy, etc. — which leads to erosion of trust among citizens and towards institutions. The fight against crime and terrorism, strengthening safety and security by managing borders, maintaining of cybernetic security, strengthening resistance in crisis situations and natural disasters, ensuring privacy and freedom on the internet and the strengthening of the social dimensions of safety are also intentionally targeted by European activities and programmes concerning public safety in our country. Many of the public safety duties that the police perform raise public safety questions and concerns in both academic and practical terms, therefore they pose valuable research questions.

Police science differentiates the pre-science and science levels (Butorac and Solomun, 2010, according to Porada et al., 2006:24). The subject of pre-science police knowledge is a certain individual situation, while from a scientific perspective the subject is abstract and relates to undetermined idealised police situations. Many public safety topics are useful for developmental and basic scientific research. With regard to the course matter and methodology of criminal investigation, and trends in contemporary science, inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary research are fostered, which represents a special challenge to the researchers and the creation of new projects. The interdisciplinary nature of criminal investigation also defines and characterises the output competences and the aims of study programmes at the Police College, and significantly determines the ratio of courses of criminal investigation profession and science to other disciplines.

The primary function of the criminal investigator as the expert or practitioner with relevant competences is shown through the social and state/administrative function of the Mol as a central body, and also through individual departments intended for the achievement of individual and internal security and the preservation of the peace and order of the Croatian nation and society.

Care and responsibility for the achievement of a satisfactory level of security is the fundamental purpose of police work, as a central element of the ministry. In this process, the role of the police and the multidisciplinary

link between criminal investigation and security phenomena are very important. In the safety–police/criminal investigation/law relationship we find the purpose and content of professional challenges fundamental, as well as the establishment of research efforts, interests and issues. With regard to the investigation of security issues, in figuring out what had happened or could have happened, several scientific disciplines are implemented according to their methodological frameworks in order to establish causalities (Solomun, 2007).

The criminal and legal fields of the profession, and indeed science, are especially important in this spectrum, because, in addition to prevention, the imperative of the security actions of the police and the application of criminal investigation is in proving responsibility for the violation of the protected object. The roles of sociological, criminological, psychological, organisational, informational, biomedical, economic, technical and other scientific disciplines are no less important in this field (both negative and positive security developments) (Petz, 1996). By taking account of current empirical work, and by changing the paradigm of ‘research after learning’ to ‘learning through research’, we could try to influence the creation of academic programmes, in particular focusing upon research professors and student criminalists in relation to their competencies.

However, there appears to be a distinct lack of research undertaken by students as part of their study programmes both before and after their stay at the Police College, which points to the need for study programmes linked with relevant research and practice. Consequently, the postgraduate study and research ambitions of criminalistics and police professionals are likely to remain unrealised and unfulfilled, and their competences may suffer.

Grading issues/discussion

The most advanced models of modern day development of employee organisation are based on Integral theory by Keneth Wilber (Borš, 2012). This theory tries to synthesise the best of pre-modern, modern and post-modern reality (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010). Especially relevant for the evaluation and discussion of the integral model are the recommendations contained in the report on quality for the academic year 2014/15, drafted by the Quality Committee of the Police College (Police College, 2014). In the category of grading evaluation

and practice of students and their studies professors are marking with higher grades ‘possess certain levels of practical knowledge and regular attendance at seminars’, whilst some of the negative aspects were found to be ‘insufficient cooperation with the Human Resources Service of the MoI and Police College regarding studies and insufficient motivation of students to study’. Similarly, in the category of the practical worth and applicability of study students show relatively ‘low satisfaction levels in relation to the study programmes’. The main objection is insufficient connection of study programmes and practice, whilst in relation to possible improvement of exit results of studying, respondents highlight as a priority ‘the need for a more substantial element of practical work’.

By grading the general situation and circumstances of the Police College as adequate, the committee recommends that in the forthcoming period the connection of the Police College with the Police Directorate be intensified at all levels.

Assessing the state of the Police College in the area of expert and scientific activities with a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threats) matrix, it can be concluded that the internal strengths consist of professors, students, infrastructure, tradition and exclusivity of study programmes (the only one in Croatia), subject of research, in addition to theoretical/practical integration with mutual activities of professors and practitioners. These elements ensure equilibrium in relation to internal weaknesses, the most significant of which include organisational and financial constraints (MoI), inconsistencies in subsidisation associated with scientific development of professors, recruiting systems and human resource management, the relative comfort and protection from competition among the professors, lack of commitment on international cooperation, etc.

Considering the opportunities and possibilities of the environment we can highlight the needs of society, communities and citizens for improving all aspects of safety, modern trends and support for research and scientific activities from European strategic programmes and financial frameworks, which would have a positive effect on the Police College and would redress the danger of environments that may be difficult to recognise.

By doing a SWOT analysis we can recognise the need to address the issue.

With a consistent policy of subsidising the scientific development of professors (funding towards research doctorates, international advanced training etc.), along with development of the recruitment and retention of scientists, this would ensure long-term stability and would enhance the national and international reputation of the Police College.

The systematic regulation of financial autonomy and identification of independent accounting protocols within the MoI would ensure that the Police College had external recognition and the autonomy to bid for projects. More frequent submission of bids for domestic projects (especially within the EU research framework and programmes) would strengthen the position of the Police College and would guarantee its prospects and the prospects of professors.

In addition to the integral model we can use the final report and accreditation recommendation of the independent expert committee of the Agency for Science and Higher Education of Republic of Croatia in the reaccreditation of the Police College. The final conclusion of the Committee highlighted that the study programme should improve in the direction of the integration of theory and practice. Importantly, the Centre of Police Research is classified as an exemplar of good practice.

The Police College has a strategic plan up to 2018 that includes the aim of enhancing personnel, organisation and financial potentials. It is based on values dating from 2008-2012. The document includes aims and objectives in five strategic areas, including education, study programmes and human potential.

The Police Research Centre, cornerstone of the implementation of the model

According to the strategy for reform of the system of managing human potential by the MoI for the period 2009-2011, in the context of strengthening education design in the Police Academy, the Police Research Centre (referred to below as 'the centre') was established as a part of the Police College. The published aims of the centre refer to gathering together all the trainers, professors and researchers of the Police College and involving other Croatian and European experts and related institutions. As an institution whose purpose is identification and evaluation of the development of

insecurity and criminality risks, the centre should contribute to the clarification and development of significant guidelines and strategies of the government of Croatia, especially in prevention, to enable the context of training to be updated, to enable the professional development of teaching staff to be evaluated and to enhance their expertise.

The activity of the centre would give (as a result) suggestions, recommendations or projects in the area in police methods and techniques, and that work could, depending on the subject and the nature, involve all MoI staff.

At the same time, an important role for the centre would be in the creation of preconditions for cascading expert and professional activities of the police and criminal experts.

Furthermore, experts and staff returning from abroad (or other projects) would represent a valuable resource to the Police College.

Based on national and departmental strategies in developing human potential, starting from lower organisational long-term guidelines and strategies, the centre follows the vision, mission and aims of the Police College, the long-term guidelines for the education and training of police officers (MoI, Police Academy, 2013), the strategic plan of the MoI, the strategy for developing of human potentials in public service, the strategy for education, science and technology and other programmes and strategy guidelines in the area of science and higher education.

According to the statute law of the Police College, the centre is positioned as the body dealing with research into delinquency and criminality, safety issues, standardisation of police proceedings and promotion of good police practice.

The aim of the functional position of the centre and of creating a system of referral centres is to update practical experiences and improve the competencies of the teaching staff of the Police College. Additionally, the aim is to recruit teaching staff from the ranks of criminalists/police practitioners.

An element of the aims and objectives is the systematic focus and analytic organisation of safety events (statistical reviews of safety indicators), as the main safety

issues in addition to clarifying the context and subjects for scientific research.

Implementation of the integral model — the basic elements of the strategic plan

Even in a complex organisational context, for the purpose of clarifying the perspective, following the general methodology of strategic planning (Bahtijarević-Šiber and Sikavica, 2001), the organisational mission, aims and objectives still remain clear.

In accordance with the object and purpose of this work, one cannot precisely determine aimed values and deadlines by strategic planning.

Methodologically, the concept has a vision and a mission and consists in two strategic areas, nine strategic goals and other tactical and operational aims and measures.

Vision for developing the centre

Based on professional values and principles of excellence, nurturing police specialisms — safety and criminalistics subject and environment and integration of domestic and foreign police practice, education and interdisciplinary science and to confirm high educational and scientific relevance and competence.

Mission of the centre

To create conditions for enriching expert competence, but also to satisfy the instructional, scientific and research ambitions of users within and outside police structures. By including and motivating police officers for the systematic monitoring of positive and negative safety events, to guarantee career prospects, to expand the educational culture and ethos, to promote lifelong learning and to create a database of professors, ensure compliance with the regulations for participation in domestic and foreign scientific-expert police and safety projects.

Strategic areas of the implementation model

Implementation of the integral model involves two strategic areas.

1. Integration of police theory and practice-expert contribution.
2. Development and emancipation of police science subjects — scientific contribution.

Strategic goal within strategic areas

Within strategic areas the strategic goals, as well as some operational measures, are highlighted as follows.

1. Integration of police theory and practice

1.1. Teaching staff

Enabling the continuous professional development of and achieving expert competences of teaching staff at the Police College and researchers from the Police Research Centre (*The Code of Police Education*, 2012) by direct monitoring of police methodology, enriching the experiential segment/exercise designed by staff so that they can improve transfer of knowledge in the teaching process at the Police College.

1.1.1. Including teaching staff/employees of the Police College in the operational working processes of the Mol, police departments, police stations and other partner agencies (*The Code of Police Education*, 2012).

1.1.1.1. Formulating the plan for conducting joint practical workshops/experiences of teachers and lecturers on a yearly basis according to determined priorities.

1.2. Practitioners

Integrating police practice and study programmes into the Police College through participation of practitioners from the police system in teaching and other educational activities.

1.2.1. Improving and modernising the system for tracking quality and evaluation of success of police officers/practitioners, and recognition and acknowledgement of their ambition for participation in higher educational programmes.

1.3. Reference centres

Creating the system, organisational model and methodology for monitoring safety events as examples of police activities through reference centres based upon criteria of the most frequent type of safety events in relation to time and space (statistical indicators of safety events and other documents of Mol, statistics of judiciary, state attorneys, National Protection and Rescue Directorate, etc.) or specialism of the police organisation in police operations (criminalistics police, traffic, surveillance and securing of the state border, specialist roles, etc.).

This approach will enable systematic research into the main safety issues (criminal offences, misdemeanour, etc.) as a subject of police actions and interest of an associated part of the public, as well as internal organisational police organisational issues (human relations, evaluating the performance of police, job satisfaction, working conditions — especially dealing with 'burn out' syndrome, which is harmful to psychophysical ability as a *conditio sine qua non* of successful policing).

Reference centres will gather together all interested professionals, practitioners and staff of the Mol, but also include members of other safety structures and, in accordance with point 1.2.1., create conditions for the expression of their teaching and research ambitions. Also, the participation of professors from the Police College and researchers in the reference centres will improve the updating of their practical experience and will also enable recognition and indication of the practical context and processes suitable for further research and scientific analysis. These will create fundamental assumptions for designing developmental (expert) and scientific (fundamental and applicable) research.

1.4. Students

Enhancing and strengthening the competencies of the graduates of the various training programmes and courses for criminalists and criminalistics specialists (study programme of the Police College) in the context of mastering discussions about the relationship between the police and safety as context for the ultimate goal in the social role of the police, standardisation of police methodology in Croatia, multidirectional improvement of success of the police system.

1.4.1. Monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the theses and final work of specialist students of the Police College and encouraging quality and the propensity of authors and mentors to publish as contributors to the creative dimension of the Police College.

1.4.1.1. Defining criteria for the evaluation of student work and creating a competitive scheme for rewarding the most successful students and mentors.

1.4.1.2. Creating a thematic frame for final theses and specialist academic work by students.

1.5. Lectures, advisory workshops, round tables, workshops and open forums on real issues where professors participate in the discussion/answer questions.

These goals involve improvement in internal communication and better exchange of information about scientific/expert achievements of all members of the Mol, especially teaching staff from the Police College and researchers from the centre with the ultimate goal of improving expert competences.

2. Development and emancipation of subjects of police science

Due to the relatively modest participation of scientific research using police methodology, organisation, criminalistics and safety as police science subjects in the scientific corpus of Croatia, it is necessary to have a research context that is suitable for scientific inquiry and the application of scientific methodology, including the availability of population samples and ethical and data protection issues.

In order to take cognisance of previous scientific research it is necessary to create systems and raise the level of knowledge for gathering data from those relevant studies and organise, index and analyse them to define criteria for judging their significance and critiquing others work.

Adequate financing and the existence of proper infrastructure are essential for effective research activities. This is only possible by strengthening the financial autonomy of the Police College and by the provision of a clear budget delineated in the financial plan of the Mol and Police College.

Taking into account the subject of police science and the level of police knowledge, these steps would be essential to encourage basic developmental scientific and expert research.

2.1. Scientific-research projects

Creating a system of approving, analysing and grading suggestions for research projects from the Police College.

2.2. Multi-institutional cooperation

To achieve effective cooperation through contractual relationships with scientific institutions within the academic and public policy systems of science in Croatia.

2.3. International cooperation

Establish and develop systematic cooperation and apply it to research projects in cooperation with other states, EU institutions, CEPOL and other international organisations.

2.4. Scientific professional meetings of the Police College

To standardise and make it commonplace to host regular international scientific/expert meetings organised by the Police College, perhaps annually.

With the aim of undertaking thematic scientific profiling the Police College suggested titles for suitable research projects for the medium term, to be discussed and adopted by the expert committee. Therefore they would become a part of this chapter and any objectives that would be additionally set out would be clear.

If the Police Research Centre had teams of suitable personnel starting up activities and supporting/encouraging students, at the same time promoting evidence-based practice, then achieving these goals would be more likely.

Conclusion

It is possible to improve higher police education based on lifelong learning by officers and placing the subject of police science into the framework of public safety studies.

Moreover, the integration of teaching-theoretical and practical-empirical content through the participation of teaching staff at the Police College in real time contributes to their professional and research competences and encourages evidence-based practice. Developing a system of higher education integrated with police practice and having teams of personnel and a consistent quality of work of the Police Research Centre would lead to scientific and expert challenges but would also develop a more meaningful concept of the links between police higher education, scientific work and research. By having a protocol that would comply with principles and norms of the Croatian qualifications framework we would be following the trend of the modern era in regulating standards of professionalism, qualification and competencies. Proceeding in this way guarantees us a more dynamic foundation and functional positioning of the Police College as an integral mechanism providing the most direct support to operational activities of the Police Directorate, the Mol and other institutions within the system of public safety in Croatia. Also, the Police College would establish or confirm its importance and position within the Croatian higher educational and scientific system, the region and the EU. By steering the Police College in this direction (with an emphasis on research and evidence-based practice), we are attempting — by the acquisition of knowledge through science and innovation — to contribute to the improvement of the overall intellectual potential and safety of society, and to pursue reputational improvements for the Police College among the wider law enforcement and academic communities.

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