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# A European Quality Assurance System for police education, a challenge for CEPOL?

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## **Abstract (250 words)**

In the international police literature exists a long-standing debate about the role and function of police education in the professionalization of the police. The discussion revolves the role of the police education as engine of socialization. Some say the police training has a limited impact on the professionalization of the police as a profession, while stating that police officers mostly learn their profession in the streets and not at the police school. Others argue that the police education can be an engine of change for the police organisation. In this outdraw of a presentation, held on the CEPOL Research and Science Conference in Budapest (5<sup>th</sup> of October 2016), we stipulate that police training can play a major role in the process of socialization towards the police profession, but to do so the police education system has to seek more alignment with (European) higher education system. We argue that if police education wants to be an agent of change in the police organisation, we need to inject more pedagogical research and expertise, and open police education up towards society. Moreover, police education has to strengthen his position and status on the European market of higher education by assuring high quality standards. 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.

## **Keywords**

European Police Education system, Accreditation, Socialization, European Education System, Police education

This paper encompasses a presentation, as presented by the CEPOL Research & Science conference on October 5th 2016. The main objective of this conference paper is not to make a scientific contribution to the world of police studies, but rather seeks 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 programs.

*“Forget everything you learned at the police school, from now on you will learn what police work is all about...”* This famous 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 ‘socialization’<sup>1</sup> in the police organization primarily takes place in the field, rather than in the classroom of the police school or during the process of training and education.

Although expectations of the effect of police education and training are sometimes high estimated by the police organization, the role of education as an instrument of socialization is still strongly debated and settled questioned. In this debate, we distinguish two opinions. **A first group of authors** questions the primarily role of training and education and argues that the socialization 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 on police officers. They draw a rather weak relationship between the training arrangements of the police organization and the further development of the (attitudes) police officers during their first years raised on

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<sup>1</sup> The process of socialization takes place within an organization. During this process individuals adopt values, norms, roles, expectations, etc. so they can function properly in the organization 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 behavior patterns in the organization. According to Chan, Devery & Doran (2003:3) socialization is *“the process through which a novice learns the skills, knowledge and values necessary to become a member”*.

site (Alain, 2011; J. Chan, Devery, & Doran, 2003; Forslin & Mägiste, 1978; Garner, 2005; Haarr, 2001; Monjardet & Gorgeon, 2005; Nieuwkamp, Kouwenhoven, & Krommendijk, 2007; Skogan & Frydl, 2004). The famous cliché is 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 characterized by a considerable administrative burden, frustration, uncertainty, moments of stress as well as 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 police everyday reality is not black and white, even quite complex (Foster, 2003). The insignificant impact of police training and education as informal source of socialization is hereby often symbolized 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 socialization process), research stipulates that they are thrown overboard very quickly once entering the streets. This might be explained by the fact that the development of new competences doesn't correspond enough with what happens on the streets. We might even assume that police students are too little resistant to the traditions of the field. This means that newcomers would essentially conform more with the traditional police culture that dominates the field, then, 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 is an important source of socialization, especially in terms of attitudes such as discipline, discipline, etc.

The truth may lie in the middle. Nevertheless, both opinions show that the process of socialization undergone by police recruits are not always in line with what is formally

'expected', which evokes the supposed engine roll of police training and education in organisational change. Despite the increased efforts in Belgium and other European countries to turn their police education systems into modern knowledge led organization, there remains considerable disagreement as to the impact of police training as a motor for change in the police organization. By this we suggest that although socialization might occur during training and education, it does not necessarily generate the right skills, meaning the skills needed to manage and solve current society problems. Moreover, training needs - much more than today – to be an engine of change in changing the police organization into a police organization 'in tune with society'.

For a more detailed description and analysis of the problem of socialization in the police educations-system we refer to former publications (De Kimpe, 2009; De Kimpe, 2014; De Kimpe & Bloeyaert, 2015; De Kimpe & Demarée, 2011; De Kimpe, Gunther Moor, Vlek, & Van Reenen, 2012). In this paper, we want to point out to three possible alterations in police education policy. These requests for change requires innovative thinking about police education, but most of all, it demands more willingness to open up the police education system. This appeal in favour of a more open and high qualified European education system is based on Chan's (Janet Chan, 1996; J. Chan et al., 2003) vision on the role and function of police education. She believes police education can be a motor of 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 the police education organizations;
- (3) We need to implement a more stringent European education and quality policy within the European police education area.

**First we plea 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 tend to focus on the question if 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 (s.l.) transfer takes place. Longitudinal research before and after the training and education measures shifts in attitudes, knowledge and skills, before and after training and education, but we don't seem to be able to explain what causes this change in this development of competences. In this, the police education process remains a black box. We have little knowledge on the influence of peers and teachers (role models) in the class-rooms, the impact of the hidden curriculum, school culture, content of the lessons and courses, evaluation of recruits and illumination of non-potential recruits. As an example, Annelies De Schrijver (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 ethical competences of police students, although ethical training was on the program, ethical rules were taught in the classroom and dilemma trainings took place 'on the floor'. But in her doctoral theses she can't clarify what caused this minor shift in ethical competence development, nor can she explain if this shift was caused during the police education program. We need more scientific pedagogical insights in 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 on our **second** proposition: we need more 'education' and less 'police' in the police education organizations. We can do this in first instance by **bringin in more pedagogical skills and expertise in the police education organizations**. Police education remains mainly a 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 large pedagogical talents, skills and passions, but this doesn't disapprove the need for more pedagogical training and expertise of the staff? Next to this, police schools might consider hiring more external teaching staff, giving an external vison on police education subjects. Above all, not everything tutored at the police school demands experience with police practice.

In the second place, we can open up the police education organisations by seeking more structural and formal alliance and cooperation with the institutions and organizations of the European higher education system, like universities, university colleges and technical universities. Despite the change and innovation of the police education system in many European countries, police training is still an exclusive police matter. Training and education takes place at police schools, far away from cities and society.

Although police education systems and programs are severely different from country to country, police education systems are often characterized as a formal, collective, sequential, fixed, serial arrangement, and is particularly attentive to the 'divestiture' of recruits (De Kimpe & Demarée, 2011). The students are trained in cohorts; the program proceeds as a function of the discipline and the increase of the compliance, as well as in the fitting of a new status or identity for the recruits (which implies that the old one is deleted). Moreover, the socialization



process takes place in a tight timeframe. The police training is often organized in the sense that it consists of several stages that have to wade recruits to achieve the final goal -the appearance of the individual in the organization (Chan et al., 2003; Fielding, 1988). In short, the police organization and the manner in which new entrants over the course join the organization, typified by Fielding (1988:16) as '*closed socialization*'. Bloeyaert (Bloeyaert, 2002, p. 505) summarizes the socialization of the Belgian prospective agents together as a '*mono-organizational 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 organization. Turning point of this coin is, in times of financial crisis and budget cuts, police education is not considered as core business. Because of this, the police education budget is always the first target of the economization. The fastest way to save money today is by shortening the police education programs. In a corporative management vision, investing in the quality of education isn't 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 of higher education. This might mean untightening the sometimes rigorous chains between national police education institutions and their national police education management.

This brings me to my thirt and final aspiration. The need for a European agency for accreditation of police study programs 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, ensuring quality assurance of public administration programs since 1999. In this, the idea of a police accreditation agency shouldn't be considered as idealistic or utopic. The overall aim of installing a police education accreditation agency is twofold:

- (1) improving and assuring the quality of Police education programs in European countries;
- (2) stimulate the liberalisation of a police education area in Europe, in order to: (a) stimulate the quality of police education programs, (b) increase the exchange of knowledge 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 will be developing appropriate accreditation criteria and standards for European police education programs, and this on the different levels of European education framework (master, bachelor but also vocational training). This allows an accreditation agency to evaluate all police education programs on the same quality assurance standards. It also increases transparency and accountability in the offer of European police education programs. Today it has to be said that police education programs - measured by different national quality standards and accreditation systems – are sometimes unequal in content and quality. This creates suspiciousness and dubiousness towards certain police education programs. Not always this is fed by institutions and programs of the regular higher education institutions, who describe these programs as low level or non-scientific education. Accreditation could gain clarity in this by giving police education programs the same status as programs accredited in the European higher education system. Furthermore, accreditation recognition can increase mobility of staff and students as it makes programs in different countries more comparable or even create more convergence, 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 in more overall societal

competences in the police education programs and cooperation with institutions of higher education. We can do this by injecting more societal learning outcomes and quality standards in the police qualification framework, ex. demanding for implementing police research expertise in the programs.

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

How does this external evaluation procedure work? Every police institution can voluntary apply for an accreditation of a police program with the agency, who then starts up a procedure. This procedure consists of: (a) the writing of a self-evaluation report and (b) an onsite visit of a visitation expert panel consisting out of police professionals, academic scholars with expertise in the domain of policing and experts in pedagogical science or familiar with education. The members do not work nor are have any alliance with the institution demanding for accreditation. (c) After the on-site visit a final evaluation report is written. In this report is mentioned whether the program meets the generally excepted quality criteria as defined in the accreditation standards developed by the accreditation agency. The output of this external evaluation is a report containing qualitative feed-back on the program. This can stimulate and help programs to reach out higher levels of teaching and improve their quality. Moreover, police institutions who wants to gain an accreditation for their programs, will be stimulated to invest in the quality criteria and the education level of their program. 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 program is 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 on the institutions of higher education (Universities and University Colleges), and therefore give more credit and status to police education institutions. This

accreditation procedure doesn't have to be in contravention with national accreditation procedures. The EAPAA-organisation did also work 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 and organization able to fulfil this role of accreditation agency. I believe CEPOL can be this mother organisation. Within her walls she needs to constitute a bureau who organizes and manages the process of the accreditation, who composes the external visitation panels and who homologates the accreditation. The constitution of the external panels is crucial in a process of visitation, 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 socialization of police officers into the police organization, we need to open up the black box of the educational process so a better knowledge transfer can take place. Next to this we need to improve the quality of police study programs by submitting police education programs to a decent quality assurance measurement. Approved programs will gain more status and institutions will be stimulated to invest in their quality. This augment of status demands also more influence of society into police programs and the control of these programs. This can be done through an accreditation system set up by a European neutral and credible accreditation agency. CEPOL could take the lead in this. This European organization can bring the national police education partners and the academic police scholars together at the table, like she does in the conference 'Research and Science'. CEPOL has the partners, the understanding and the power of the European commission to do this. To conclude, like 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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