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Measures against prejudice at the Hungarian Police – theoretical research on police culture and cop culture

Abstract

The author would like to present the measures taken by the Hungarian Police against prejudice in the context of this article. For the analysis, she has chosen the police and cop culture approach. Her aim is to present the organisational framework and the human being itself separately. In the author's opinion, training and education fall between the two cultures. The author proposes further research and education on cop culture, and suggests the introduction of intercultural education to prevent prejudicial behaviour and improve cooperation. The author considers that, by teaching both subjects, police officers will have a better understanding of both prejudices and the dangers of the police profession.

Keywords: police training and education, prejudice, police culture, cop culture

Introduction

Prejudice and prejudicial behaviour are the most serious deviant behaviours at the Hungarian Police, alongside corruption. This article aims to present and analyse the Hungarian Police's measures against prejudice. Two main areas of analysis, police (formal) culture and cop (informal) culture, and the interface between them, police training and education in Hungary, will be presented.

In this article, the author aims to show that those who choose to become police officers not only have special rights – such as the monopoly on legitimate physical violence – which are often emphasised, but also have obligations which apply not only to their working hours, but also to their activities and behaviour during their leisure time. There is a lack of published research in the field of



cop culture in Hungary, so the analysis of this field focuses mainly on the literature and the findings of foreign researchers.

Police culture

As far as laws and regulations are concerned, the organisation and members of the police forces are subject to stricter rules than the average civilian citizens. The basic tasks of the Hungarian Police are defined in the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Article 46), while the detailed regulations on the organisation, operation and activities of the police are laid down in Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police (Police Act).

The regulation on prejudice can already be found in the Police Act, which states that *'the police officer is obliged to act in accordance with the law, without bias'* (13. § (2) Police Act). The conduct of life of the professional members of the police are also governed by Act XLII of 2015 on the employment status of professional staff of law enforcement agencies (Police Officers' Service Act) and the Code of Ethics of the Hungarian Police. According to Chapter III *'The specific nature of the service relationship'* of the Police Officers' Service Act, the non-prejudice is the ethical principle of the police profession (Article 14 (1)). This is supplemented by the Code of Ethics of the Hungarian Police, which on the one hand, states the prohibition of discrimination in point 4, and on the other hand, under point 5 it defines the type of action to be taken *'The police officer shall be prudent and moderate in the use of the authority vested in him, shall carry out his actions free from prejudice and emotion, and shall avoid unnecessary conflicts. He shall not use or tolerate torture, ruthless, inhuman or degrading treatment...'* In a broader sense, the expectations set out in all the other points in the Code of Ethics of the Hungarian Police help to prevent prejudicial behaviour, as following them does not allow police officers to engage in prejudicial behaviour ([URL4](#)).

Based on the Code of Police Ethics and Code of Conduct *'The ethical principles of the law enforcement profession with regard to members of the professional staff are in particular: loyalty to the country and the nation, preference for national interests, dignity and integrity, freedom from prejudice, impartiality, professionalism, cooperation and proportionality.'* Unlawful behaviour, including prejudicial (deviant) behaviour is controlled from two directions - from inside and outside - of the organisation.

Within the organisation, it is implemented through the hierarchical structure and additional regulations, such as the obligation of police officers to report

to their superiors on events and measures taken in the course of their duties, and through the control by the internal (police) body responsible for crime prevention and detection (the National Protective Service). The impeccable conduct of police officers is also regularly monitored by the Service. Police officers can only be admitted to both training courses and the police force after a strict psychological examination. Regular psychological screening and assistance within the police force also help to prevent police brutality and prejudicial behaviour, and the unified HR¹ system of the Hungarian Police serves as a guarantee that members dismissed from the organisation for deviant behaviour cannot be reinstated.

An external control is the guarantee of citizens' fundamental rights, i.e. the possibility for citizens to complain against a police measure if they feel that their fundamental constitutional rights have been violated. In 2008, an Independent (NGO²) Police Complaints Board was established in Hungary, with the aim of examining the activities of the police from the point of view of the fulfilment of fundamental constitutional rights, which also means the control of police activities (Horváth, 2019). The organisation operated until February 2020, when its task was taken over by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

At the Hungarian Police, unlawful conduct will be investigated in any case, and those forms of conduct and ethical misconduct which are not subject to other procedures by law will be subject to the Code of Police Ethics. Complaints made by citizens can be found on the website of the Hungarian Police.

Cop culture

While police culture focuses more on laws, regulations, environment and organisational frameworks, cop culture focuses on the persons themselves, the behaviour, the reaction and the values of police officers. There is no single and accepted definition of cop culture, however, researchers in many countries around the world have made almost the same statement, as if cop culture were a kind of universal human response to the police profession, which can be found anywhere in the world. Of course, the findings do not apply to all police officers within the police forces. Research in the area of cop culture and prejudice is still limited, mainly concerning the 'street cop' level, which has the most contact with the civilian members of the society, but some general results are available.

1 HR: human resources.

2 NGO: non-governmental organisation.

The people responsible for prejudiced police assaults are almost always male, and the assaults are mostly linked to the 'Norms of Masculinity' within the police. Attention should be paid to the phenomenon of 'Resistance officers', where a member of the group provokes (perceived or real) resistance to the use of force, thereby forcing their colleagues into a situation of violence, and the dangers when police officers position themselves as Warriors to defeat evil. (Behr, 2017).

Everyday policing can reinforce prejudices against certain groups, especially if officers have to confront the same groups every day (interview with Kersten 2009), and the 'blue wall of silence' makes it difficult to discover prejudicial behaviour in the police. *'...there is a wall in the overall police organization that separates 'us blues' from the civilians - that can be the concerned citizen, a person with a migration background, a critical politician, a journalist, whoever. Anything I see as a police officer in the way of mistakes made by my colleagues, I keep inside the wall - and sometimes I even keep quiet about it to superiors.'* (Kersten, 2009).

Although the Hungarian police academic literature does not deal with cop culture separately, some of its aspects and findings appear, e.g. in police management theory it is a part of organisational culture, in police sociology it is a part of occupational and organisational culture, but other literature also refers to the results of this kind of research. From the perspective of police management theory, *'organisational culture is understood as a system of beliefs, values, norms, shared experiences and common actions, activities and behaviours shared by members of the organisation'* (Czuprák-Kovács, 2013). In a police sociology approach, there is a distinction between occupational and organisational culture, occupational culture is more a kind of identity, norm, pattern of behaviour, language and dress standard, a cognitive filter, and organisational culture is *'solidarity between police officers, attitudes towards power and social problems and attitudes towards civil and political expectations'* (Kozáry, 2017).

Hungarian researchers have described two phenomena so far, the 'us and them', which refers to the close nature of the members of the organisation, and the 'end justifies the means' mindset, and member bias, is harmful to efficiency (Kovács, 2016).

The 'ends justify the means' mentality is referred to in other literature as Dirty Harry's dilemma (Klockars, 1980), the danger to the policeman's sense of justice. *'Sometimes, however, the sense of justice of police officers can become dominant against the law. These constellations then lead to delinquent, at least deviant, actions'* (Behr, 2014). According to Kozáry, *'the stress and pressure of the job can make police officers desperate about the effectiveness of the justice*

system, which can lead to an 'ends justify the means' attitude' (Kozáry, 2017). Finszter links the phenomenon to 3 myths. If all three of them are realised, police work will be morally - and legally - damaged. *'The myth of violence confuses harshness with cruelty; effectiveness is justified by the end justifying the means. The myth of hierarchy gives the impression that the organisation also has an information monopoly. It can carry out surveillance of society without control and freely dispose of the data it acquires, whereas the police's knowledge of public order can only be used to protect the community, and the only legitimate purpose of criminal investigation is to prepare the way for justice. The myth of secrecy leads one to believe that there is no need to take responsibility for offences committed in the exercise of authority. And indeed, accountability is very often lacking.'* (Finszter, 2014).

The last public prejudice survey - on xenophobia - was published by the police in 2010. One of its findings was that first-year police students were more tolerant than third-year students, who were measured more closely to active police officers. The researcher herself notes *'It seems that the closer students get to employment, the more similar they are to active police officers. Cognitive dissonance, a psychological state in which an individual experiences a discrepancy between his or her own attitudes, beliefs, thoughts or actions, is likely to play a role in this.'* (Zán, 2014).

Another survey conducted between January and May 2019 among current police officer students also allowed to measure their willingness to cooperate. The research measured students' cooperativeness before and during joint task implementation. The results of the research showed that competitiveness was lower than cooperation, both before and during the joint task, while competitiveness increased during the task, courtesy towards group members decreased. This is due to the goal-orientation and the ambition of the officers to achieve results. The researchers pointed out that in the future, the resulting conflicts should be managed by leaders (Kovács-Tózsér & Pesti, 2019).

Police training and education – interface between the two cultures

On the one hand, police training and education are adapted to police culture in terms of content, both consciously and formally, through the development of the content of the training and education, on the other hand cop culture is expressed informally, through the advice, experiences and stories told by trainers and instructors.

Police training in Hungary has a long tradition. The beginnings of police training date back to the 1920s, and in fact these early courses are the basis of both police training and education (Sallai, 2017, 2018; Boda, 2016). The promotion of scientific research dates back to 1972, when the Department for Police Science of the Ministry of the Interior was established, and nowadays police science has developed into an interdisciplinary science recognized by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Doctoral School of Police Science has been established (Kerezsi & Pap 2015; Boda et al., 2016; Janza, 2019).

Police education can be divided into two levels, officers and non-commissioned officers training and education. Non-commissioned officers training and education can be provided through 10 months of patrol training or 2 years of training and education at a police vocational college. Only persons over 18 years of age, who have graduated from high school and meet the requirements, both physically and mentally, may enter the training to non-commissioned officers. Both patrol training and officer training are based on 50% theory and 50% practice. During the trainings, future police non-commissioned officers are taught the duties and rights of police officers. The subject of prejudice is covered from a legal and ethical point of view, as well as within the framework of the social studies subject ([URL5](#), [URL6](#)).

Officer training is currently offered at three levels – Bachelor, Master and PhD/Doctoral level. The history of the first ‘Police Academy’ dates back to 1947, which operated until 1949, when officer training courses were again organised (Kozáry, 2001). In 1971, the Police College was founded, and started its operations on 1st September 1971 (Boda, 2016). This institution was the legislative predecessor of the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the National University of Public Service, which was established on 1st January 2012. In the same way, students enter officer training at the age of 18 after graduation, and they also have to meet the physical and mental requirements. The issue of prejudice is also discussed in several subjects, not only in the field of law, but also in the sociology of law enforcement, ethics, hate crime, and psychology ([URL1](#), [URL2](#), [URL3](#)). The sociology of policing draws on historical experience and case studies, the hate crime course introduces students to the Roma and Jewish cultures and deals with the LGBTQ+ communities, and in the framework of police ethics they deal with the expectations towards police officers, and psychology focuses on the cognitive part.

It is important to note that the training of police officers does not end with the completion of the police vocational college or the university, members of the professional staff are obliged to undergo further training, and this obligation only ends after 5 years before reaching the retirement age. In-house training

and certified training programmes are adapted to changes, development and expectations of the society, so they also include knowledge and competence development programmes to overcome prejudices. De-escalation training also aims to prevent the use of violence.

Conclusion

Hungarian laws and regulations, and specific rules on the organisation and members of the Hungarian Police, clearly prohibit prejudicial behaviour. During the training and education, the characteristics and dangers of prejudice are presented to the police officers in several aspects and the Hungarian Police also pay attention to the further training of both officers and non-commissioned officers. There is no published research on cop culture in the Hungarian Police, however, one or two observations can be found in the available literature. It would be necessary to summarise the research results and to continue research in this area, and it is proposed to educate police officers in cop culture, so that they have a better understanding of their own situation and the challenges of their profession. The results of research conducted in 2019, which showed that future police officers are goal-oriented and both cooperation and courtesy towards group members decreased at implementation of task, also foreshadow the danger of ‘the end justifies the means’ to achieve results. It would be useful also to introduce intercultural knowledge training to improve cooperation and help to overcome prejudices.

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