Conceptualising the role of police culture in change strategies

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1 Introduction

The history of police reform in Belgium reveals that police culture has never been a real concern to our policy makers. The focus has always been on the structural reorganisation of the policing landscape (Enhus & Ponsaers, 2005). Similarly, literature about the Belgian police culture(s) is almost non-existent. Academics who tried to shed a light on the various dimensions of the former police force have never ventured to consider police culture as a research subject. Nonetheless many of them have endorsed the importance of this culture. The police departments often made limited analyses, but the findings were seldom or never published.

Moreover, the culture of police departments has been effectively researched at international level. To conceptualise the role of police culture in change strategies, a review of this literature is necessary and this should take a number of elements into account. First, a study of a culture (the culture of a group of people, an organisation or a nation) is in itself beset by theoretical and ideological schisms. Second, a survey of a culture invariably means the researcher him/herself subscribes to a specific cultural trend. A grasp of these trends and their research methods is nearly indispensable in order for us to gain a full understanding of police culture and, almost important, for us to be able to interpret the findings.

This contribution starts with a theoretical review of the problems encountered when studying culture in general and the trends it inspires. Secondly, we focus on police culture and describe the key findings of the available studies, while showing how they reflect certain cultural trends. Thirdly, we move away from the unidisciplinary approach and we seek to adopt an interdisciplinary stance for each of the cultural study problems we explained in the first part of this paper. Therefore, the study of police culture is rather complex: various approaches and research methods have to be factored in. Conversely, the simplicity lies in the fact that opting for a specific approach and type of research allows this approach to be incorporated, its limitations to be recognised and the research findings to be assessed in the light of their true value. Therefore, understanding culture through research paves the way for the incorporation of culture in change strategies, which is an important point of interest in current reforms of police systems across the world.

2 E.g.: In 1993 the Belgian Gendarmerie carried out an opinion survey amongst its members to discover the level of motivation and the attitudes of state police employees (N=1800).
2 The study and research of culture

‘Culture is a blank space, a highly respected, empty pigeonhole. Economists call it ‘tastes’ and leave it severely alone. Most philosophers ignore it – to their own loss. Marxists treat it obliquely as ideology or superstructure. Psychologists avoid it, by concentrating on child subjects. Historians bend it any way they like. Most believe it matters, especially travel agents.” (Mary Douglas, 1987)

The study of culture, whether it concentrated on a nation, an organisation or a profession, has always involved a variety of theoretical and ideological premises. The study of culture always forces the researcher to adopt a specific viewpoint on culture. To fully understand and interpret the results of those studies it is important to fully grasp the different theoretical and ideological premises and the research methods that are applied. In the following, we will therefore focus on the study and investigation of culture and apply the insights in a second part on the study and investigation of police culture.

A study of ‘culture’ means examining an issue that has been surveyed elaborately by sociologists, historians, anthropologists, philosophers and politicians. The studies have neither resulted in an identical approach to culture nor in a harmonised definition or a single methodological approach. Various overviews of cultures also reflect the complicated nature of the concept. Stuart Hall (1980) claims the cultural concept is the site of converging interests rather than a logical or clear conceptual idea. Nevertheless, in what follows we try to get grip on this complexity by giving an outline of theoretical and empirical literature on culture. The aim is to gain a better understanding of cultural theories and beliefs that also underpin the study of police culture and the way research on this topic is conceptualized.

2.1 The content-based approach and defining culture

Within this section we pay attention to the theoretical approaches to culture on the one hand and cultural definitions and analysis on the other hand.

2.1.1 Approaches to culture: free will versus determinism

Cultural theory is based on two dimensions: the subjectivist and the mechanistic interpretation of human activities.

According to the subjectivist interpretation, human activities are primarily motivated by human qualities: feeling, perception or susceptibility. People ‘follow’ a specific cultural system more for voluntary reasons than for strictly mechanistic ones. Human experience is a central feature as a source of meaning: people make history. Culture determines human activities.

According to the mechanistic interpretation human behaviour is first of all a reaction or a reply to environmental factors. Experience is not authentic but predetermined. The reasons for following a cultural system are therefore not voluntary but more a question of unconscious action.

These approaches have provided a framework for specific cultural definitions and research methods.
2.1.2 Cultural definitions and cultural analysis

The subjectivist interpretation defines culture in terms of values or ideas (symbols). The mechanistic approach focuses on structures within which these values and ideas are formed. Depending on the authors, the structure is understood in terms of the historical social structure (described as class structure by many Marxist writers) or the specific conceptual structure (thought structures including ‘the world’).

In the case of the subjectivist approach (e.g. Parsons, 1952) values take shape around issues in the social system, such as equality versus inequality and respect for authority versus critical behaviour. In this perspective, the key aim of cultural research is to obtain knowledge about these values as well as the process which allowed the values to become part of the social system. These analyses are carried out through (quantitative) structured, uniform interviews in order to gain insights into the values of the respondents.

Other authors (such as Geertz, 1973; Edgerton, Langness, 1979; Van Hoewijk, 1988; Denzin, 1989) reject the idea that culture is made up of values, claiming it involves symbolic universes which the participants build onto this culture. Culture is a process of developing meanings. Culture is defined, depending on the specific trend, in terms of people’s intellectual background (culture comprises ideas, is a system of knowledge), of reciprocal human activities (culture is a social-cultural system) and of an almost formal procedure (culture is a regulatory system). The content is assessed in the light of quantitative techniques or interviews, observations and conversation analysis.

The mechanistic interpretation covers various ideological views. We single out the materialist view, the structural approach of culture and the structuralist approach seeking to reconcile the former two.

Materialists believe that culture also involves values and meanings. The difference with subjectivists is that ideas and opinions are not so much formed as they are rooted in a social structure. The source of meaning is not human experience itself, but the material (historical) circumstances determining the experience or, in materialistic terms, ‘consciousness’. Research in this context is primarily historical. Later approaches (Gramsci, 1980; Williams, 1963, 1965; Thompson, 1968; Hall, 1980) have tempered this way of thinking in terms of structure and culture as separate poles: there is dialectic between being social and consciousness. Various groups and classes derive values and meanings from their given historical circumstances and relationships. Conversely, lived traditions and practices in which insights are expressed in turn play a role in determining history.

In the structural approach to culture, with Lévi Strauss (1992) as its main exponent, people are primarily regarded as bearers of structures. Experience is not a source of authenticity but a result of unconscious thought structures and categories. They create practices that give meaning. These unconscious structures are studied in the light of a qualitative assessment of the social discourse that is best compared with the analysis of a language’s grammar.

Finally, the structuralists claim that culture represents all practices giving meaning, created by categories and frameworks of thoughts, which in turn are rooted in the so-

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3 The values are determined by the economic conditions of existence. Consequently, the values of a higher class are different from those of a lower class.
cial (materiel, historical) structure (for example, Laclau, 1977; Althusser, 1976). Various intelligence gathering techniques, all qualitative, are used in order to identify this empirical basis.

2.2 Cultural focus

The cultural focus specifies the kinds of questions that arise during an analysis of culture. This refers to questions about the origins and the implications of a specific culture or about its nature and characteristics.

A specific cultural focus is first of all chosen in view of the required research outcomes/questions. Three levels are singled out (Louis, 1985):

- The natural level comprises research questions considering the origin of a specific culture (‘where does the culture come from?’), the outcomes and their effects (‘where do they lead to?’) and the actual manifestations of this culture (‘how does it appear?’).
- The efficiency level is connected to the ‘management’ of culture. This approach is characterised by questions such as what can be done with or for a specific culture. The priority is the potential power of a culture and to what extent this power can be managed and controlled or guided. The reflective level covers all the attempts to understand the nature and characteristics of a culture as well as the debate concerning the related philosophical assumptions, structures and targets of a culture. This level offers the broadest approach: the research questions for the previous levels may also form part of this.

2.3 The limitations of culture

The limitations of culture refer to both the scope of the environment under study (Is there reference to the culture of a country, region, city, organisation, etc.) as well as the group of people whose culture is identified (does this involve the culture of police officers, ‘management cops’ or ‘street cops’? etc.). Given that police officers form part of a very specific organisation, the effective connection between organisation and culture has to be researched. The literature offers two perspectives for understanding this connection: first culture as a variable in the organisation and secondly culture as a ‘root metaphor’.

2.3.1 Organisation and culture: culture as a variable in the organisation

Various studies of organisations (for example, Schein, 1967, 1985) define culture as shared basic assumptions. In this perspective, groups and organisations have a culture only if they are fairly stable. Groups and organisations develop as a result of an adaptation to the environment and internal integration issues (concerning power, rewards, punishments and the like). This idea of culture as the ‘cement’ of the organisation forms the theoretical basis for developing cultural typologies.

A number of authors (such as Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982) took these ideas one step further by looking for the key to commercial success in cultural characteristics or specific ‘types’. The resulting ‘one best way strategy’ is the
belief that successful organisational cultures are universally applicable and therefore malleable. This was qualified by Bollinger and Hofstede (1980): a successful organisational culture also has to be compatible with a country’s culture. Not every culture is uniformly amenable to a specific organisational culture, nor is this compatibility a guarantee: in the case of one of the companies of Peter and Waterman, for example, there was no essential conflict between its organisational culture and the national culture and this was described as highly successful in terms of cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, the company still went bankrupt.

What these approaches have in common is the way they define culture in terms of equal assumptions: culture as a cement for the whole. It is less important whether there assumptions are referred to at the level of the country, organisation or suborganisation, culture is a variable within this level.

2.3.2 Organisation and culture: culture as ‘root metaphor’

Organisations are in themselves cultural phenomena (Smircich, 1983; Frissen and Van Westerlaak, 1990). Culture is the determining factor and therefore the ‘modeller’ of the organisation, which has a number of implications. First, the limitation of culture is problematic. Since culture does not exist as a variable, there is no actual ‘level’ for it to be analysed on. Culture is everywhere but difficult to grasp. Secondly, looking at organisations as cultural phenomena implies that all cultural differences outside the organisation (such as the ethnic group, the professional category and training) will also have an impact within the organisation and its subcultures. Thirdly, seen from an ‘organisations as cultures’ perspective, it is unimportant to pay attention to the question of effectiveness. Organisations exist and have or generate one or multiple meanings for the people who constitute the organisation. Consequently, the cultural concept in this theoretical stream offers no indication about how organisations function effectively.

2.4 Conclusion

This extremely brief overview shows exactly how complicated studying and investigating culture is and the extent to which it involves a variety of theoretical and ideological premises. The belief that human beings are the creators of culture and society is contrasted with the fact that a human being is not a completely autonomous being but is largely determined by the structures within which he/she exists. There are also various viewpoints about the content of culture: does this involve values, ideas, symbols, does culture consist of patterns of behaviour or a set of rules, or is it more a question of shared assumptions? These questions and various starting points underpin all cultural studies, irrespective of whether a culture is studied in terms of a general cultural context or an organisation culture.

Both the content of culture and the way its relationship with the social structure is understood affect the way culture is researched. A quantitative methodology is contrasted with qualitative methods and historical research with purely contemporary research.

Just as important for cultural research are the reasons for investigating culture. One option may be the desire to gain more knowledge and a better understanding of culture, as well as the aim of deploying culture in a change strategy. In the latter case
there is a need to guard against simplification and normative judgements about the limitations of culture, its content or its ‘power’.

This paper is about police culture. The question is how far the problem areas, mentioned above, are encountered in the study and investigation of police culture. Our examination is based on international studies as well as (the admittedly limited) research in Belgium.

3 The study and investigation of police culture

Published in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the first studies on police culture originated in the Anglo-Saxon world (such as Skolnick, 1966, Westley, 1970, Wilson, 1968, Van Maanen 1974, 1975, 1979, Cain, 1973). The initial theorists were extremely reductionist and we might say that the discipline of the researcher sets the tone for the way people understand police culture: sociologists focus on socialisation processes; psychologists consider the culture of the individual police officer at field level; organisation theorists mainly discuss the way the members of an organisation behave within the context of the organisation. It is also important for the various disciplines to provide a variety of insights. The following studies are arranged in chronological order but the list is by no means exhaustive.

3.1 The pioneers: ‘working personality’ and ‘police behaviour’

Back in 1950 Westley (1970) undertook the first sociological analysis of the American police organisation. He paid attention to the uniqueness of the police profession and the implications for the identity of each policeman or policewoman. One of the implications is the informal code of behaviour of officers and the careful attention for secrecy: it is always better to say too little than too much. New recruits are socialised into this culture via rituals: “Their occupational culture is transmitted and maintained through the various initiation rites that mould the rookie policeman, a process culminating in the rookie’s recognition of the rules and values of the group as defining his own self-esteem” (Westley, 1970: 105)

Skolnick (1966), taking his cue from Westley, regards the police culture as a set of values, attitudes, rules and practices that have an impact on the way police officers carry out their duties. This culture develops in relation to the specific characteristics of policing, such as the dangerous nature of the work in the community, the authority of the supervisors and the pressure to boost the productivity and effectiveness of the organisation. This unique combination of factors generates a cognitive response and a behavioural one. A ‘working personality’ is developed with the following characteristics: suspicion, social isolation, internal solidarity, a deep sense of mistrust between the police and the community, the exercise of authority (which exacerbates the misunderstandings, an ambiguous relationship with moral principles (power and manliness are essential qualities for combating evil), the closed nature of the force, the conservatism and informal pressure for effectiveness (Skolnick in Parenté, 1994). Skolnick also points to an interaction between the psychological and the social characteristics of

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4 His thesis was completed in 1950 but not published until 1970.
the environment and the profession: the former will form part of the 'working personality'. Comparable studies which focused on the British and American police systems, Banton (1964) and Clark (1965) draw roughly the same conclusions.

Wilson (1968) takes this idea one step further and researches 'police behaviour' in eight different communities in Great Britain. Police officers appear to tailor their working style to the environment they are operating in. Wilson describes three types: the 'watchman style', 'legalistic style' and 'service style'. He attached a lot of importance to the values and standards that develop both within the police organisation and at field level referring to the idea that the policeman/woman is a member of a 'trade'. Police officers are reported to absorb the applicable cultural rules via 'leadership' rather than formal training. Experienced beat officers involved with 'real' policing consequently make a comparatively large impact on police culture.

The focus on the socialisation process leads to the next stage in the study of culture. The research covers not only recruitment and training but also socialisation at field level. An investigation is made in particular of the extent to which these processes affect the development of police officers' personalities and action style.

3.2 Transfer of the 'working personality' and 'police behaviour': formal and informal socialisation

Interest is growing in the formal training of newcomers, based on the assumption that the values and standards of recruits and the police culture are interconnected (McNamara, 1967; Harris, 1973; Van Maanen, 1973, 1978a; Hopper, 1977). Attention is paid to the content of culture and the way its values and standards are transferred.

Gray (1975) shows how the American police organisation cultivates and safeguards the uniformity of its culture. In the light of individual screening, for example, the police force recruits individuals who can demonstrate an affinity with the police organisation and its culture. Consequently, police training is regarded as being of little use for determining the behaviour of police officers. Weiner (1974) even goes as far as to suggest the police force's role in society neutralises the police training. Socialisation at field level is often more important in gaining skills than the training itself. Authors increasingly feel that the police culture itself primarily develops in the workplace. Informal socialisation is gaining in importance as a research subject.

3.3 Nurturing the police culture

Police culture covers the values and standards that affect behaviour patterns and work practices, as they are applied by the officers (Van Maanen, 1974, 1975, 1979, 1984; Cain, 1973; Brown, 1981; Punch, 1983; Reiner, 1985).

According to Sandler and Mintz (1974) police culture is nurtured by the specific image, the 'self image' of police officers, that is largely built upon the basis of the image of the 'crime-fighter', the fight against crime.

5 "I try to describe the behavior of patrolmen discharging their routine law-enforcing and order-maintaining functions, to explain how that behavior is determined by the organizational and legal constraints under which patrolmen work, to discover the extent to which it varies among police departments, and to determine insofar as the evidence permits what accounts for these differences and especially how local politics contributes to them.” (Wilson 1968:10).
Speaking about police culture, Punch says “...An unwritten and almost unconsciously learned occupational code exists which articulates and informs actual police work.” (Punch, 1978: 517).

Brown (1981) reproduces the image of the ‘crime-fighter’. Police officers seem to pay little attention to rules and procedures and operate from an ‘action perspective’. A key component of this perspective is the loyalty and bond of solidarity among police officers. The police culture thus defined is a source of friendship, protecting the officers against outside criticism.

Other studies nonetheless show that crime-fighting accounts for only a small part of policing (Manning, 1978; Punch, 1979). The duties of police officers are more often located in a grey area between policing and social work. However, Punch claims they would rather not know this. They are not keen on associating requests for help with policing, so prefer to avoid them, with the result that the police service is focused on acting in response to clear problematic situations, giving rise to a reactive culture, according to Punch.

This analysis has in turn given rise to the assumption that police culture is determined less by the nature of the work than by the prevailing ideas about policing.

3.4 Implicit assumptions of police culture

Chatterton (1975) studied the police force’s world view and the attitude of police officers towards their job and the way they perform their duties. Manning (1977) also paid attention to these implicit assumptions. A recurring factor here is the way police officers use stereotypes to organise the world and, more importantly, to simplify: ‘policing labelling practices’ (Van Maanen, 1978b).

The authors argue that this view of the world and work does not have an immediate impact on police activities on the ground, as these activities still also depend on the specific situation: “In a sense, the freedom of the patrolman to enforce or not to enforce has the effect of creating rules. His rules are not the administrative rules, which derive substantially from the criminal code or municipal regulations, but are those ‘rules of thumb’ that mediate between the departmental regulations, legal codes, and the actual events he witnesses on the street.” (Manning, 1977: 162). ‘Good police work’ is defined according to each situation.

Recognised and problematized for a longer period of time, the discretionary responsibility issue (Bittner, 1967, 1970; Goldstein, 1964, 1977; Muir, 1977) is in this context related to police culture. Police officers are acknowledged to enjoy a degree of scope and autonomy at field level to interpret rules and procedures and also to enforce them depending on the situation. Culture is said to play a key role precisely in this type of interpretation and enforcement.

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6 This is why they are described as the ‘secret social service’.
7 He was the first to carry out research into police culture in continental Europe. In the early 1970s he researched the activities of the Amsterdam police.
8 Goldstein identifies the discretionary responsibility in the ‘gaps’ created by the dynamic interplay between a) the rules of the broader community and the police departments and b) the informal culture of the police service as a world full of rules.
3.5 Organisation theories and police culture

Research into the implicit assumptions of police culture and police activities at field level, the recognition that police officers largely construct ‘their’ culture themselves as well as the general opinions of organisation theory cause multiple cultures to be identified within a single police organisation. Reuss-Ianni and Ianni (1983) proved that police culture is not a monolith. In light of conflicting perspectives in procedures and practices, they make a distinction between two cultures: that of the ‘street cops’ and that of the ‘management cops’.

Applying conclusions drawn from organisation theories results in police culture being regarded as a component of the control system within the police organisation (Brown, 1981; Lipsky, 1980). Apart from the formal, military-bureaucratic control based on a strict line of command, police officers are also subject to an informal control in light of the prevailing culture. And this is often the most important. According to Brown (1981:83) this is because: “Hierarchical controls are directed toward (...) the more mundane aspects of job-related behaviour. The group controls, on the other hand, are directed to those behaviors of immediate concern to the performance of the police task”.

Finally, consideration is also given to the interaction between the police culture and environment of the organisation. This is known in organisation theories as the ‘contingency approach’. According to Alderson (1979), who was part of the police force for many years, there is a clear relationship between the culture of the community and its police force. He sums this up in the winged expression: ‘To police us you should live with us’.

3.6 Police styles, implicit assumptions, organisation theories and informal police culture

In the 1980s and 1990s, authors generally built upon the earlier conclusions. The research is often more fundamental, the findings more detailed.

Reiner (1985) and Broderick (1987) continue to research categories of police styles. Reiner (1985) makes a distinction between ‘New Centurion’ (the genuine crime fighters), ‘Uniform Carrier’ (the cynics), ‘Professional’ (sympathetic officers) and ‘Bobby’ (those who regard policing as a profession). Broderick (1987) makes a distinction between ‘Enforcer’, ‘Realist’ ‘Idealist’ and ‘Optimist’. Reiner (1985) also describes the characteristics of police culture (having a mission, cynicism, machismo, racism, political conservatism and pragmatism), referring to seven types of stereotyping of citizens as a functional requirement for police officers at field level: (‘good class villain, police property, rubbish, challengers, disarmers, do-gooders, politicians’). Police officers are said to use these stereotypes to legitimise their activities on the ground. Van der Torre (1992) also reproduces the idea of a police style, making a distinction between ‘restorers of order, ‘social workers’, pragmatic loyalists’ and ‘pessimists’, on the basis of his research in the Netherlands. He suggested that what the various types of officers did was not much different, in contrast to the differences in how they did their work.

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9 Tom Van den Broeck (2001:40-48) recapitulates the work of Wilson (1968), Reiner (1985), Broderick (1987) and Van der Torre (1992), believing there are similarities in the way the four authors rank police style.
In the case of implicit assumptions, more and more authors contend that police officers are more than passive objectives absorbing the police culture (Fielding, 1988; Shearing and Ericson, 1991; Reiner, 1992:109; Shearing, 1994; Chan, 1996). Fielding regards police officers as the intermediaries of the structural and cultural effects of the profession. Their individual experience interacts with the requirements of the work and the pressure of the job. Shearing and Ericson claim that police officers actively construct their culture so as to arrange reality into some kind of order. Culture is transferred less via a process of socialising and internalising rules than via a combination of stories and aphorisms indicating to the officers how they should regard the work and how they should behave within this context. Culture is cultural knowledge, taking the form of ‘police stories’: they form the plans and instructions police officers use as a basis for seeking information, organising it into categories, taking action and legitimising this action. Chan also defines culture in terms of cultural knowledge, based on the work of Bourdieu (1990, 1992). Her theory acknowledges the interpretative and active role police officers play in relating their skills to the social and political context of policing.

Organisation theories continue to have an impact on cultural research (Roberg and Kuykendall, 1990). Research on corruption within the Dutch police force prompted Punch (1985) to conclude that the environment had a major impact on the interaction between police culture and those involved in the culture. Others point out that environmental conditions represent a key factor in the development of police culture (Alpert and Dunham, 1988; Wasserman and Moore, 1988; Greene and Decker, 1989).

Greene et al. (1992) fleshed out the distinction between ‘street cops’ and ‘management cops’. They made a qualitative investigation of how police culture is connected to the interrelationships between core staff, between the core staff and supervisors and between both staff categories and the population. Manning in turn makes a distinction (1993) between three subcultures: the culture of the command, middle management and core staff. The individual variable he uses as a basis for making this distinction cover various items, such as personality, generation and career development. Added to these are structural variations in terms of rank, task and specialisation (Reiner, 1992; Chan, 1996; Parienté, 1994; Punch, 1999).

Goldsmith (1990) sees police culture as an informal regulatory framework which is also functional. The informal rules regulate the behaviour of police officers, enabling them to survive in a profession regarded as dangerous, unpredictable and alienating. As well as being a variable to explain and predict policy behaviour, culture is regarded by Goldsmith as a way of finding solutions for misbehaviour and even influencing discretionary responsibility. In order to be able to control and regulate the police force, police culture also has to be ‘confirmed’. The police officers themselves have to regard this as useful. This raises the tricky question of how police culture is involved in formulating rules for giving structure to the exercise of discretionary responsibility.

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10 In the case of the ‘transfer’ of culture, Fielding (1984, 1988) and Southgate (1988) researched the formal training of newcomers entering the police force. Monjardet and Gorgeon (1992, 1993a, 1993b) carried out a longitudinal study in France on the socialisation of police officers during their training.
3.7 A specific organisation theory: management

In the late 1980s management jargon began to replace the military terminology more and more. The NRC Handelsblad reported: “The police is called (here) a ‘powerful brand’ that ‘has to be communicated’. The police is spoken of as a ‘business’, citizens are called ‘customers’ and policing consists of ‘products’ that need to be ‘clear products’”. Conclusions drawn in the private sectors are transposed into the police organisation. The manager specifies the ‘required’ values with which each police officer has to comply (Cachet et al., 1993; Greene et al., 1994; Mastrofski, 1998) in order to achieve a result-based, customer-oriented and quality ‘product’. The police officer is called upon to devise a strategy to close the assumed gap between existing and required values, such as, recruitment, training, discipline, leadership and opportunities for promotion.

In the Netherlands, research in support of the police organisation in the early 1990s was based on management theories (for example, Fokkinga et al., 1992; Wilders, 1994; Van Keulen and Brink, 1993; Hagenaars and op ten Noort, 1993). Van Keulen and Brink apply a ‘culture diagnosis model’ to the Dutch police service. They examine the market strategy, the innovative capacity, the power, management style, information, communication, the social climate and the differences of opinion within the police force. They define how the cultural characteristics should appear according to the new style. Hagenaars and op ten Noort research the cultural and innovative capacity of the regional police in Gelderland-Zuid. They raise the question of how the management of the existing culture can be steered in the required direction.

3.8 French viewpoint

In the 1990s, French researchers also decided to get involved in the study of police culture. Parienté (1994) and Monjardet (1992, 1993, 1994) did not agree with the Anglo-Saxon definition of culture in terms of shared values. They concluded that police culture is not as uniform as it is often assumed to be. According to Monjardet, individual officers take up positions in relation to the ‘law’ (defer or interpret) and the ‘others’ (openness or otherwise). That police officers are subject to the rules of the law is also indicated by way of legalism. The fact that they also interpret the law is a reflection of their view of the law as a limitation, framework or a contract. The positions individual officers take up in relation to the ‘others’/‘les non-policiers’ refers to the degree of transparency/secrecy, their position in relation to other ‘players’ on the field of security and their openness to partnerships. These two axes (‘law’ and the ‘others’) or this coordinate system should determine the position of police officers in relation to all other values, which in fact allow for a certain degree of variation.

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12 The Fokkinga research team used the standard Hofstede questionnaire (1980) to research the basic values of the police. The key question in this cultural research is whether the organisation culture of the police region under consideration is consistent with its internal integration function and external adaptation function and whether cultural differences between the police forces may create problems for the region in the future.
13 They use the Sanders & Nuijen (1987) model which, subsequent to in-depth research, drew the conclusion that six cultural dimensions may be singled out (result-based versus process-based, people-oriented versus work-oriented, professional versus organisation-based, open versus closed, tight versus loose, pragmatic versus normative).
This approach puts the importance of values in the police culture into perspective, making it dependent on the connection with the environment, the regulatory framework in which the police operate and the personal interpretations of the police officers.

### 3.9 Belgian research on police culture

Police culture has been a neglected field of study in Belgium. All in all, there has been only one study (explicitly related to police culture) commissioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs. As a result of the impending merger at local level, Antwerp University’s ‘Institute for Management and Administration’ researched the cultural differences between the state police and the municipal police (Ceuppens and Mertens, 2001).

As is often the case in management theories, the researchers take organisation theory conclusions as a starting point, in which the psychologist Schein (1980, 1992) was a key influence. They assess the organisation culture with a standardised questionnaire whose reliability had already been established in business circles. An assessment was made in particular of the competition amongst employees, competition with other organisations and the willingness within the organisation to take risks. The upshot is that the study focuses more on the management style(s) of municipal police and the state police than on cultural differences. Both police services are said to be hallmarked by an oppositional style\(^4\). This finding was presented to the supervisors of both organisations. The following quotation needs no comment: “The supervisors who were interviewed acknowledged the aforementioned recapitulation. The belief is that this explanation at organisation culture level is completely true but there is still a factor that transcends this organisation culture: police culture. It was terribly difficult to get the respondents to elaborate upon this theory, everyone senses the difference in culture but cannot put it into words.” (Ceuppens and Mertens, 2001:13).

Meanwhile, research is conducted in Belgium which generated insights that are closely related to police culture. One example is an empirical research which examined the extent to which Community (Oriented) Policing (COP) takes shape (or not) in multicultural neighbourhoods and through contact with ethnic minorities, and how both parties feel about this (Easton et.al., 2009)\(^5\). This type of research ties in closely with what is often described as police sociology, which gives a picture of how policing actually takes shape in the social processes between police officers and citizens and between the officers themselves (van der Torre, 1999). The assumptions of this study rely on Shearing and Ericson’s (1991) claim that police officers actively construct their culture so as to arrange reality into some kind of order.

One of the main conclusions is that the building blocks of experience from which policemen construct perceptions of the community are fragmentary and the perception is selectively created. The research results, gathered in six neighbourhoods through observations and interviews, indicate that the police assess “regular (tough)

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14 The researchers use the focus questionnaire to compare the Organisation Culture Profiles of the municipal police and the state police. For further details about these instruments, see Van Muijen et al. 1996.

15 This research (01/12/05-31/05/08) was financed by Belgian Science Policy (www.belspo.be) and a contribution is published in this volume under the title ‘The view of the police on community policing in Belgian multicultural neighbourhoods’ by Marleen Easton & Paul Ponsaers.
customers” and classify them in their own categories, for which they create strong perceptions. The boundaries of these categories sometimes coincide with ethnicity, but just as much with other characteristics, such as age, lack of parental control, gender aspects, marginality, immigration status, etc. These categories refer to the ‘policing labelling practices’ Van Maanen (1978b) developed in his earlier work. In relation to the work of Skolnick the relationship between perception, internal reasoning and approach in the field seemed to be quite complex and influenced by different factors such as cultural and social capital of the policemen on the beat & situational factors. In this respect this research reflects different trends in the study of police culture mentioned above.

3.10 Conclusion

The preceding overview shows how most of the studies described take the subjectivist interpretation of human activities as their starting point. Therein, police officers are deemed to ‘determine’ their own organisation culture. Conversely, Gray (1975) suggests the cultural socialisation begins much earlier. His investigation into an American police department showed that solely individuals that already display an affinity with the culture of the police organisation, on the basis of their own physical backgrounds, are recruited. Chan (1996) attaches importance to the (partly unconscious) thought structures of police officers, which, in turn, are of key importance for the action they take.

There is a lot more variety in the approaches to defining culture. Some authors consider the content of police culture: the values, the personality, the police style, the implicit assumptions, the informal culture, etc. Others focus on its development: the police profession or rather the ideas or perceptions that are available about the profession should determine the culture. The transfer of the culture is another factor: an examination is made of the formal socialisation process, such as recruitment and training, as well as informal processes arising at field level. Others interpret police culture on the basis of organisation theories: of key importance in this respect are the control within an organisation, the line of command, plus the existence of subcultures and the relationship with the environment. In the final analysis, ‘managers’ mainly regard culture as an instrument to be manipulated in order to achieve a specific type of behaviour or push through a specific policy.

This latter group researches culture on the basis of a purely rational cultural focus. This is obvious in the statements made about the power of culture and the complete faith in its controllability and manageability. The research questions of their predecessors mainly originate in the natural cultural focus: how does the culture appear in practical terms (cynical, macho, conservative, solidarity-based,…) , what law enforcement approach does it give rise to (action perspective, reactive,…) and how does it emerge (job requirements, perceptions,…).

16 See for example, Westley, Skolnick, Wilson.
17 See for example, Van Maanen, Cain, Punch, Reiner, Manning.
18 See for example, Van Maanen, McNamara, Harris, Hopper.
19 See for example, Reuss-Ianni & Ianni, Brown, Lipsky, Alderson.
20 See for example, Fukkinga, Wilders, Van Keulen & Brink, Hagenaars & op ten Noort, Ceuppens & Mertens.
Lastly, culture is primarily researched as a variable in the organisation. The impact the environment has on culture formation is increasingly acknowledged: some regard this as a precondition, for others it is almost essential\textsuperscript{21}. The limitations of culture in terms of organisation culture are also seconded by a belief in culture as the ‘cement’ of an organisation and the basis for determining typologies\textsuperscript{22}. Solely the French authors refuse to regard culture in these terms and assign more importance to personal interpretation\textsuperscript{23}.

In sum: both culture in general and police culture in particular have been researched in different ways or more effectively within various academic disciplines. First and foremost, this points towards the complicated nature of culture and the difficulty of investigating it. In this respect, all the approaches considered are more complementary than exclusive. However, as far as they are independent and not related to other conclusions their understanding of culture continues to be comparatively limited and unsatisfactory, hence an interdisciplinary approach is recommended (see also Paoline, 2003).

4 Culture revisited and how culture “works”

In this last part, we hope to make a case for the future study of police culture. For this, we opt for an interdisciplinary approach and consider the problem areas in cultural studies based on this perspective. This results in an analytical formula that clearly shows the complementary nature of the diverse theoretical visions or trends. From a practical point of view, the formula constitutes a possible basis for the development of a change strategy in which culture is given a place among other variables. In particular, the relationship with the environment within which the change must occur, and the policy, is explicitly set out.

4.1 The intrinsic approach and definition of culture “revisited”

Today, it seems outdated to hold on to the pure form of the cultural approaches. One cannot understand “culture” without connecting this to subjective meanings, nor without taking into account its limits, typical of the social structure. One cannot interpret social behaviour without assuming that someone is following codes invented by someone else, nor can one ignore the fact that humans are the ones who create a changing environment for each cultural code.

To summarise, culture consists of cultural and structural “elements”.

Cultural “elements” include values and attitudes (for police culture, e.g. manliness, internal solidarity, bravery, authoritarianism), but also ideas, assumptions or unconscious thought processes (for police culture, e.g. the use of stereotypes), beliefs, symbols, rituals (for police culture, e.g. the “police stories”, badges).

\textsuperscript{21} See for example, Wilson, Alderson, Punch, Alpert & Dunham, Wasserman & Moore, Greene & Decker.
\textsuperscript{22} See for example, Broderick, Van der Torre.
\textsuperscript{23} See Parienté and Monjardet.
Structural elements in a police environment include the line of command or hierarchy. They can be manifested in specific cultural practices (e.g., the manner of greeting).

These cultural and structural elements overlap and “articulate” with one another, resulting in something which we call (work) culture in its entirety. These may refer to the organisation or the police environment as such, but also to the society of which they are a part.

In order to make an inventory of all these “elements”, it is best to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Interviewing people systematically and uniformly should provide an insight into their values and the way in which these have been acquired. Ideas and underlying assumptions emerge mainly during more in-depth, open conversations and observations. It goes without saying that an idea of the historical context will always help in interpreting and possibly clarifying values, ideas and human behaviour, also in a broader context.

4.2 The cultural focus “revisited”

The research questions which guide the study within the natural and practical focus of culture (see above), are not about the culture itself, but about how culture “works”: how it comes into being, what the effects it generates (natural focus) and what kind of “power” it has. It is not the content of culture or the acquisition of knowledge in relation to culture that is central, but its origin, its effects or “what people can do with it”.

However, if one does want to examine the content of culture, a reflexive focus is essential. This implies as broad an approach and definition of culture as possible, as was argued above (how culture “works”, can only be discussed when developing a possible change strategy).

4.3 The boundaries of culture “revisited”

Here, culture as a variable is opposed to culture as a metaphor. In this field, culture as a metaphor would imply a study of the police organisation as a concrete manifestation and historical outcome of Western society and culture. But this is not the kind of study we have in mind. That is why we cannot help but see culture as a variable, while taking into consideration the existing points of criticism and the limitations of this option.

In view of further research, culture is foremost a variable which needs to be “filled” with values, norms, symbols, ideas, behaviour, etc. However, it is important, precisely within this kind of research, to have a reflexive focus and to avoid lapsing into clichés regarding the value or power of a culture.

It is also important to recognise the interaction of the cultural variable with other variables. The following, last part discusses how this is possible.

4.4 How culture “works”

Culture does not exist in itself. It always exists in interaction with other variables. The most obvious of these variables, often occurring in the development of theories around culture and police culture, is the environment. Policy is a variable as well: during the possible implementation of (here: police-related) policy measures, one speaks
of “cultural resistance” or “cultural (in)appropriateness”. As a result, a certain interaction or mutual influence between culture and policy is likely.

The question moreover arises as to how all these variables are related to the output in the field, i.e. the actual policing. The following formula draws attention to precisely those relationships. It can, therefore, serve as a guideline to draw up a change strategy, to the extent that a policymaker wants to take cultural diversity into consideration. The definition is analytical: it shows three ways in which culture is linked to variables such as policing, policy and the environment (Klitgaard, 1992; Van Ryckeghem, 1995; 1996a; 1996b).

4.4.1 Culture and policing in an analytical definition

(a) Policing = P (Policy, Environment, Culture, etc.)
(b) Culture = C (Policing, Policy, Environment, etc.)
(c) Utility_C = U_C (Policing, Policy, Environment, etc.)

(a) The combined action of policy, environment and the existing culture leads to a certain outcome in policing, e.g. a particularly reactive or preventive approach, a high or low degree of clarification depending on the criminal phenomena, etc.
(b) But culture is not a static, and therefore unchangeable, variable. It is itself subject to a changing environment, a specific policy and the policing outcome that accompanies this.
   In practice of course, the two equations merge into one another: they continuously influence one another. Often, however, only one level (and often also a very limited number of variables) is taken into consideration when drawing up policies. One expects to find a direct relationship and outcome based on the policy measures enacted.
(c) A third level is the utility function: cultural subjects only subscribe to a certain kind of policing and policy if they also derive an individual or social added value from this. This “human” aspect can best be explained in terms of reward systems, legal benefits, etc. The manner in which one rewards or is rewarded is largely determined by culture. Suppose the decision is taken to integrate different police services with each another. If such a reorganisation would take place in an environment where the police services distrust one another or are in some way prejudiced against each other, then it seems advisable to combine the reorganisation or the policy measure with additional benefits. Naturally, these benefits must also be regarded by the players as adding real value in comparison to the earlier situation. This softens the original policy measure.

24 The first equation is a production function for policing. A production function is an input-output relationship. It shows the relationship between the dependent variable (the output: “policing”) and the factors “deployed” for that (the input: “policy”, “culture”, “environment”, etc.). In other words, policing is a function of policy choices (e.g. the organisation of the force, the priorities with regard to police tasks), environmental factors (e.g. rural or urban), cultural elements and others.
25 The second equation is a production function for culture. Culture is, in its turn, a dependent variable and a function of the (outcome of) policing, the policy, the environment and other factors.
26 The third equation is a benefit or utility function. Policy measures, environmental factors and the outcome of policing are assessed by the players based on their social benefit.
In making policy choices, it is opportune to consider culture at the three levels. More knowledge of the variables and their mutual interaction in the equations can open up opportunities for rethinking policy strategies in light of culture.

4.4.2 Police cultural studies and the analytical definition

The studies on police culture, which we have discussed in part 2, are mainly situated at the first level of the definition. Policemen create the culture and culture help in determining the outcome of policing. Organisational theorists acknowledge the link with environmental factors, but see the interaction with culture as primarily unidirectional. The extent to which the existing culture also influences the environment, and how this combined action determines, among others, the policing, is less discussed.

4.4.3 Policy and/or change strategies and the analytical definition

The formula can be helpful in devising policy strategies because it is a guideline for listing the diverse variables and because it takes into consideration the way in which they influence each other and are influenced by one another. We illustrate this formula with an example before and after the significant reform of the Belgian law enforcement system in 2001\textsuperscript{27}. As an example of the past we refer to the introduction of the “Basic Police Care with Quality” (Basispolitiezorg met Kwaliteit or BPZ-K) project in the Belgian state police in 1992. The recent example refers to the introduction of “The vision on an ‘excellent police function’” in the integrated police force in 2007.

In 1992, the government asked the police services to pay more attention to the safety needs of the citizen. The Belgian state police responded to this with a specific project: Basic Police Care with Quality (BPZ-K). The inspiring forces behind the project thought they would be able to bring about a real cultural change by developing specific initiatives in brigades and districts and introducing methods for a problem-oriented analysis (compared to the incidental approach). This would lead to an increased readiness to help each other and to more cooperation with the population. Concrete initiatives included asking the help of postmen for providing information, or developing contacts with inhabitants with a view to more (direct) cooperation\textsuperscript{28} (Van den Broeck and Easton, 1997). It was hoped that this form of project-based working would develop into a process-based work method throughout the organisation and the metaphor of a spreading drop of oil (the oil spot phenomenon) was used to describe this. But at the end of the 1990s, the BPZ-K movement, died down, which was partly due to the social circumstances (police reorganisations), (Easton, 2001).

If we look at the BPZ-K project based on the formula for culture and policing, the basic question that arises is whether the existing culture and the environment were amenable to the adopted policy measure. We deem it possible that the policymakers did not truly ask themselves this question. The reactions from the environment with regard to the notable initiatives mentioned above were, in any case, negative: the in-

\textsuperscript{27} With the law on the integrated police force (07/12/1998) structured on a local (local police) and a federal (federal police) level, the state police, municipal police and Criminal Investigation Department, who used to be separate agencies, were integrated.

\textsuperscript{28} Despite other initiatives, these have become the most well-known, partly due to the media attention and the fact that they appeal to the imagination.
habitants, the management of the Post, the press, everyone spoke out against “the use of postmen as the ears and eyes of the police”.

In addition, there was a great deal of resistance at other levels of the state police organisation (culture): staff members did not feel involved, felt that there were too many changes within a short time, etc. Subsequently, the mutual interaction of policy, culture, environment (the independent variables) has not resulted in a real change in the police output (the dependent variable), except in a rather limited and temporary way.

Nevertheless, it must also be said that the BPZ-K movement was responsible for small but still significant changes in the existing culture (the dependent variable). The relationship between the state police and citizen was, for the first time, problematized by the organisation itself, the isolated position of the state police with respect to the population was brought under discussion, and new methods were introduced for dealing with problems. In addition, the brigade personnel could, for the first time, initiate projects themselves.

Finally, at a third level, we discuss the benefit of the policy, the environment and the outcome of policing for the actors themselves. In our opinion, the social benefits lie mainly in the shared idealism, the cooperation with like-minded people, the “exciting” belief in the change of an old and powerful organisation and working for the benefit of the population, and in making an individual contribution to that change. Since these “benefits” remained limited to a relatively small group within the state police, the movement did not even carry enough weight to actually push through the policy. This also partly explains why the oil spot has stopped spreading at some point.

Since 2007 “The vision on an ‘excellent police function’” is the guideline in the reform of the Belgian integrated police. The main goal of the vision is to integrate the ‘community oriented police function’ (mentioned in the Law on the integrated police function and implemented by circular in 2003), ‘intelligence led policing’ and ‘optimal management’ (as a combination of management models or – theories made especially applicable to the police organization) into a government policy in the field of ‘societal security’ (Bruggeman, et.al., 2007).

This ambitious vision generated the pitfall that a community oriented police function could be obtained by implementing intelligence led policing (a working method) and principles of ‘optimal management’ (a management model). No effort has been made to take into account the bottom-up input from the professionals on the street (the existing culture), which have to implement the policy of community oriented policing. Nonetheless, the empowerment of these professionals is a crucial factor of success in changing the overall organization. This refers explicitly to the utility function mentioned above (Easton, 2008).

To some degree this policy document generates the same concerns as the BPZ-K-project in 1992. The existing culture of the policemen/women on the street was not the point of departure to generate the vision on an ‘excellent police function’. Besides, a great deal of resistance within the organisation arose due to the fact that the COP-reform had been installed since 2003 and people felt a new challenge was presented much too soon. As a consequence the utility of the policy was questioned (Easton & Dormaels, 2008). Nevertheless, the policy document seems to be kept alive amidst leaders in the organisation. The future will show whether the new policy will succeed and whether it will take the organisation one step further in the change process.
Conceptualising the role of police culture in change strategies

For recent international examples dealing with policy and change strategies in relation to police culture see Armacost, 2004; Brunetto, 2005; Chan, 2007, Davies, 2008.

5 Conclusion

In this article, the key perspectives in cultural studies have formed the framework for a discussion of studies on police culture. It is primarily the subjectivist interpretation of human behaviour that seems to predominate here. People make their own history and culture, policemen their own police or organisational culture.

In this interpretation, most researchers have defined the culture based primarily on their own discipline: psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists speak respectively over working personality, values and norms, ideas, symbols and rituals. At the organisational level, this is mainly about culture as the “cement” of this organisation. But this vision is challenged by the exposure of subcultures on the one hand (Anglo-Saxon authors), and the role of personal interpretation on the other (the French authors).

The management theories, which had a very strong presence in the 1980s as well as in the 1990s, have narrowed the concept of culture further down. Their first concern was not culture, but rather the “modernisation” of organisations and the development of change strategies. From this perspective, culture appeared to be simultaneously important and malleable, but intangible as well.

It is certain that it will never be possible to define culture completely. However, the most complete option for cultural studies continues to be a combination of the insights from various disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach, which is consistent with a reflexive cultural focus, must also be reflected in the research methods: the use of a single method means shedding light on certain cultural aspects and ignoring others.

It is also certain that there is no success formula for cultural change. But one can reduce the chance of “failure” by taking into consideration various factors and their mutual interactions, but in such a way that a change strategy remains workable and manageable.

Our police organisations are beyond question manifestations of contemporary society. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume everything can be controlled or managed; realism and modesty, together with a pinch of luck are likely to remain key ingredients of our formula.

6 Bibliography


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