

Intercultural competence in the training and daily professional lives of police officers

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Abstract

This article explains the role of intercultural competence in the training and daily professional lives of police officers, and proposes ways to improve the acquisition of this competence. The goal is to describe intercultural competence, highlighting its importance and the possibilities for its acquisition in the training and professional everyday lives of police officers. The article uses general scientific methods – analysis of scientific literature and documents, as well as the induction–deduction method, drawing conclusions and making proposals, and (grammatical, historical, systemic, teleological) methods of interpretation of legal regulations, analysing applicable legislation and policy planning documents. The study concludes that the daily work of the police in today’s environment requires good management and cultural awareness in dealing with residents, with the consequent development of intercultural competence among police officers as a prerequisite for successful performance and cooperation with different communities in a multicultural society. The acquisition and development of intercultural competence should be included in police training programmes, complementing professional standards as appropriate, and in professional development activities for police officers. At the same time, the structural changes in the State Police should be addressed, with responsible officers being identified to deal with culturally diverse populations, and professional models for police dealing with culturally diverse populations should be developed.

Keywords

A-S-K-E-D model • policing in multicultural societies • intercultural competence • police training

Introduction

Internationalisation is one of the trends characterising the world today. As a result, the interactions among states and peoples (societies) are expanding, the ‘international element’ is increasingly present in various national affairs and processes, population mobility is rising significantly, different cultures are interacting with one another, and intercultural communication is developing (Alcácer, Cantwell, Piscitello, 2016).

Free movement of persons is also one of the values of European integration for the European Union (Articles 3(2), 21 of the Treaty on European Union), and, as stated in Treaty on European Union Article 1 (a): “The Union is founded on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities. These values are shared by Member States in a society where pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail...” (Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, 2012). The Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union also states that “the Union shall promote the preservation and development of

these common values while respecting the diversity of cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe, as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels; it shall seek to promote balanced and stable development and shall ensure free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and freedom of establishment”, while Article 22 of the Charter states: “The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity” (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2016).

This also means that every resident of Latvia may come into contact with a representative of another culture, religion or language in his/her everyday life, raising the question of scenarios/algorithms for action in this situation. Moreover, the context of such communication is particularly important for law enforcement officials, who must be able to interact and communicate with anyone (including the so-called ‘inconvenient clients’), and respecting the particularities/characteristics of individuals can greatly facilitate professional performance. Against this background, the article explains the role of intercultural competence in the training and daily professional lives of police officers, and proposes ways to improve the acquisition and development of this competence.

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The present article aims to describe intercultural competence, highlighting its importance and the possibilities of acquiring it in the training and professional everyday lives of police officers.

The article was developed using general scientific methods – analysis of scientific literature and documents, as well as the induction–deduction method, drawing conclusions and making proposals, and (grammatical, historical, systemic, teleological) methods of interpretation of legal regulations, analysing applicable legislation and policy planning documents.

Research Results and Discussion

Intercultural competence

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, every police officer may come into contact with a person or persons from a different culture in the course of his/her everyday professional life. That is why his/her intercultural competence should be developed, both in studies and in his/her daily professional activity. It is a systemic set of interrelated and complementary knowledge, attitudes, behavioural strategies and habits that enable effective work in intercultural communication situations (Hanovs, Laicāne, Mihailovs, 2009).

Moreover, intercultural competence is manifested in an institution's activities through its staff and clients, and their beliefs, communication styles, attitudes and behaviours. It also requires respect and tolerance for differences and diversity in opinions and actions, the ability to accept the unfamiliar and to elaborate on one's own specificities (characteristics/quirks). At the same time, such an approach must be supported in the governance and operational practices of the institution.

Intercultural competence includes:

- (1) Awareness of one's own values, traditions and culture; understanding that cultural differences exist and play a role in the development and functioning of individuals, communities and societies;
- (2) Knowledge of other peoples, cultures and traditions, combined with the ability to apply this general knowledge to a specific person and situation (cultural assessment);
- (3) Adaptability to diversity – the ability to live in a multicultural community/society, to understand differences, to reject stereotypes and prejudices, to adapt professional skills to the needs and specifics of a client (respect for different traditions and cultural expressions, use of languages, communication, etc.) (Samušēviča, Iliško, Margeviča, Kravale-Pauliņa, Rimšāne).

One of the theoretical models of intercultural competence that is useful for professional practice in multicultural societies

is the so-called 'A-S-K-E-D' dimensions, which respectively include:

- (1) Cultural awareness, which requires a thorough self-examination of an employee's own culture and an acknowledgement of one's own biases, prejudices and assumptions about persons from minority groups;
- (2) Cultural competence (skill), which includes the ability to obtain and gather culturally based data on the problems and needs of people from other cultures in the assessment process;
- (3) Cultural knowledge, which involves seeking and obtaining detailed information about other cultural and ethnic groups;
- (4) Intercultural encounter, which involves engaging in cross-cultural interactions with culturally diverse groups, which consequently changes the employee's existing beliefs about a cultural group and removes existing stereotypes;
- (5) Cultural desire, which involves the employee being motivated to engage in intercultural work situations rather than being forced to engage in the four processes mentioned above. It involves a genuine willingness to accept differences, construct similarities and learn from other cultures (this is referred to as the process of cultural competemility).

Thus, intercultural competence involves the ability and capacity to interpret different cultures, paying attention to language, symbols, gestures, patterns of action, etc., accordingly forming the basis for culturally sensitive professional activity – everyday professional activity that takes into account cultural specificities and differences, i.e. cultural diversity (Hanovs, Laicāne, Mihailovs, 2009).

Culturally sensitive professional action reduces discrimination, strengthens equity by increasing access to services and opportunities for target groups, strengthens cooperation, justice and efficiency by contributing to the development of a cohesive society that respects diverse expressions, takes into account and balances the needs and interests of different stakeholders, and seeks and develops the best ways for state institutions to communicate and engage with the community/society.

In this context, the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society 2021–2027 deserve mentioning: "The concept of a cohesive society, as defined at the level of the European Union, has three interrelated dimensions:

- (1) relationships among people – mutual trust, social networking, acceptance of the diversity of society;
- (2) rootedness, or belonging – faith in the institutions of the state, a sense of justice and a strong connection to the state;
- (3) understanding of the common good – people's sense of responsibility for their fellow human beings and willingness to help or solidarity, respect for general rules of society and civic/political participation" (Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society 2021–2027).

Intercultural competence in police training

The development and implementation of vocational and higher education programmes for police officers is based on the relevant occupational standards, which effectively determine the content of the training/study courses to be acquired. In accordance with Section 24 (1) of the Vocational Education Law: “an occupational standard is a document containing the requirements for professional qualifications, including the duties and tasks of professional activity, the general and professional competences required for their fulfilment and the requirements for prior learning, for one or more interrelated professional qualifications” (Vocational Education Law, 1999). The basis for the award of a professional qualification is therefore proof that the knowledge, skills and competences described in the occupational standard have been acquired.

The following occupational standards, approved at the meeting of the Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council on Vocational Education and Employment on 20 May 2015, are currently in force and also provide for vocational and higher education and professional qualifications for police work:

- (1) Occupational Standard for Senior State Police Officers;
- (2) Occupational Standard for Junior State Police Officers;
- (3) Occupational Standard for a Junior Inspector of the State Police (Occupational Standards effective 2008 till 2016).

None of these occupational standards mention intercultural or cultural competence, which also means that the acquisition of such knowledge and skills is not compulsory in the teaching/study process.

At the same time, intercultural competence, as an important component of professional activity, is partly indicated by the requirement of being able to communicate not only in the national language, but also in one foreign language (for a junior inspector of the State Police) or at least in two foreign languages (for a junior officer of the State Police or a senior officer of the State Police). Different aspects of cooperation between police and community, including cooperation with different groups, are addressed in studies of police organisation, especially in the context of community-oriented policing.

This means that by learning foreign languages and the organisation of police work, at least at a minimum level, the learner’s understanding of the importance of intercultural competence in professional work is indirectly developed. At the same time, this also suggests that such intercultural competence development in the training of police officers is insufficient.

Several professional (competence) development or adult informal education programmes at the State Police College are related to the development of intercultural competence: ‘Respect for Human Rights in the State Police Activities’, ‘Understanding Muslim Culture, Religion and Legal System in the Context of Human Rights Protection’, ‘Policing in a

Multinational (Multicultural) Society’, etc. (training curricula), explicitly emphasising that a police officer’s interaction with representatives of other cultures requires special training. According to one of the authors of these educational programmes, Dr.iur. Ēriks Treļš: “the professional development education programme “Policing in a Multinational Society” is necessary for State Police officers with special service ranks in order to increase their level of tolerance and improve their ability to work in a multinational society” (Treļš, 2015).

In this context, reference should also be made to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Recommendations on Policing in Multinational Societies, which include a recommendation to include minorities and inter-ethnic relations in both the initial training and professional competence development of police officers. Furthermore, “police codes of conduct should include professional standards for policing in a multi-ethnic society, and police education programmes should include components specifically designed to achieve these standards”. In addition, training must be practical, with lectures supplemented by interactive methods, practical exercises and role-plays (Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies, 2006).

The draft Plan to Reduce Racism and Anti-Semitism 2023 also recognises the importance of education and professional development to ensuring the safety of vulnerable groups in society, while noting that “all regional directorates of the State Police conduct annual training for officers, the curriculum of which includes the topic of hate crime” (Plan to Reduce Racism and Anti-Semitism 2023). At the same time, training on hate crime issues does not cover all the specific issues related to the specificities of policing in a multicultural society. In view of the above, the training and development of professional competence of police officers should include a study course/professional (competence) development programme ‘Intercultural Communication’, the aim of which is to promote critical analytical thinking and action by developing intercultural competence and intercultural communication skills for the effective performance of official duties. Consequently, those who follow this study course/professional (competence) development programme will be sufficiently competent to develop a clear intercultural attitude, to overcome their own prejudices and stereotypes, demonstrating their readiness to understand the specificities of working with cultural diversity (culturally sensitive professional work), as well as to critically analyse the dynamics of intercultural communication in the context of a given community (Daniel et al. 2021). This will also ensure that the first three dimensions of the A-S-K-E-D model, namely cultural awareness, cultural competence and cultural knowledge, are acquired/developed.

This proposal also requires that the occupational standards setting out the professional qualification requirements for police personnel be supplemented by the professional

competences, knowledge and skills necessary for the exercise of professional activities in the field of intercultural competence and intercultural communication.

A similar view has been expressed by the Expert Group on Community Cohesion Policy, recommending that the professional standards for several professions that work with people on a daily basis, including police officers, should include professional competences for “working with culturally diverse people” (Report of the Policy Expert Group on Community Cohesion, 2016).

Intercultural competence in the professional daily lives of police officers

As a person employed/serving in a public administration institution, an employee of the State Police is bound by the principles and ethical values of public administration.

One of the principles of public administration is the principle of good administration, which includes the implementation of fair procedures within a reasonable time and other rules aimed at ensuring that public administration respects the rights and legitimate interests of the individual (Public Administration Structure Law, 2002). As the Ombudsman has pointed out: “The principle of good administration requires, *inter alia*, a sympathetic and respectful attitude towards the individual by the public or local authority, which includes not only the obligation of said authority to act in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, but also its obligation to continuously improve the quality of services provided to the individual, bearing in mind that public administration serves the public” (Principle of good administration).

Public administration employees are also obliged to respect human rights, to act as efficiently, conveniently and accessibly to the individual as possible, and to act in the public interest, including due regard for the rights and legitimate interests of the individual (Public Administration Structure Law, 2002), as stipulated in Section 10 of the Public Administration Structure Law.

Section 5 of the Law on Police also states that “The police shall protect the rights and legitimate interests of persons regardless of their origin, sex, age, social and financial status, occupation, residency, race or nationality, attitude to religion, political or other convictions, as well as education and language, place of residence or other circumstances” (Law on Police, 1991).

One of the values of public administration is working for the public good, which requires every public administration employee to abide by the basic ethical principles based on this value, i.e.:

- (1) to act in the public interest, to the greatest possible benefit of the country and society;
- (2) to be people-oriented, demonstrating an understanding of the needs and capabilities of residents

(users, clients), respecting the rights and legal interests of individuals;

- (3) to respect the equality of all members of society, and the principle of fairness in finding just and proportionate solutions;
- (4) to foster relationships with individuals based on cooperation, trust and mutual respect (Values and Ethical Principles of Public Administration, 2018).

In light of the above, one may conclude that a police officer must be able to cooperate with any person, to take into account the particularities and cultural specificities of that person, and to find a solution even in situations where a different culture, language, religion or any other circumstance creates obstacles to direct communication/cooperation. In this case, identifying a situation and understanding the actions of the parties involved is a prerequisite for a solution, either by choosing a different course of action or by involving a mediator (perhaps from the relevant culture, religion or language community).

It should be noted that the fifth report on Latvia by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2019 recommended the establishment of a unit within the State Police to establish ties with vulnerable groups “to increase trust in the police and address under-reporting of racist, homophobic and transphobic hate crimes” (ECRI Report on Latvia. (fifth monitoring cycle), 2019).

However, as recognised in the draft Plan to Reduce Racism and Anti-Semitism 2023: “As part of structural reform, the State Police plans to introduce prevention inspectors, whose occupational duties will include, as far as possible, cooperation and work with representatives of various groups of society, including vulnerable groups. Adequate education and professional development is essential in order to enable State Police officers to carry out their investigative function effectively, including, to the extent possible, ensuring the safety of vulnerable groups in society” (Plan to Reduce Racism and Anti-Semitism 2023). Experts in the field of cohesive societies also believe that “in order to reduce the spread of negative stereotypes and prejudices, as well as discrimination of any kind, ... it is necessary to develop guidelines for diversity management and non-discrimination in public administration (e.g. a standard for the provision of signposting services for different clients to be implemented in state and local government institutions: ... in policing” (Report of the Expert Group on Community Cohesion Policy, 2016).

“The Recommendations on Policing in a Multi-ethnic Society state that the police should make sure that they are able to communicate with ethnic minorities in their own languages, either by providing multilingual staff or by involving qualified interpreters, as appropriate. The police should play an active role in encouraging and supporting minorities to communicate and cooperate with the police” (Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies, 2006).

This will ensure culturally sensitive policing and the development of the closing two dimensions of the A-S-K-E-D model, namely cultural encounter and cultural desire, while further strengthening the first three dimensions and creating the conditions for a cohesive society with a high level of trust between residents and public authorities (including the police), acceptance of social diversity, and an understanding of the common good. Moreover, intercultural competence can only be demonstrated and developed in practice, by working with culturally diverse groups and populations.

Conclusion

The day-to-day work of the police in today's increasingly culturally diverse society requires good governance and cultural perspective in dealing with residents. This creates the need to develop intercultural competence of police officers as a prerequisite for successful functioning and cooperation with different groups in a multicultural society.

Therefore, the acquisition and development of intercultural competence should be included in police education programmes, complementing as appropriate the professional standards that define the professional qualification requirements for police personnel, as well as in professional competence development activities for police officers.

At the same time, structural changes in the State Police should be addressed, with responsible officers being identified to deal with culturally diverse populations, and professional models for police dealing with culturally diverse populations should be developed.

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