

OPINION:

Community ties: Project Unity strengthens connections between Croatian Police and diverse communities

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The COVID-19 crisis has impacted upon police forces across the world. Vice Dean of the Police College of the Republic of Croatia Assistant Professor Ruža Karlović tells Policing Insight how the active engagement in community policing research and innovation with European police partners has supported the organisation and delivery of COVID-19 emergency measures to local communities.

What is the role of the Police College in Croatia?

The Police College in the Republic of Croatia conducts higher education for police officers in accordance with the permit of the Ministry of Science and Education – it is a public police college that is also part of the Ministry of the Interior. Uniquely, it is the only institution in charge of higher police education in the Republic of Croatia. Higher education includes two studies: the Professional Undergraduate Studies of Criminal Investigation which is three years duration for a bachelor's degree, and the Specialist Graduate Studies of Criminal Investigation which is two years duration for a master's degree.

The Police College also conducts scientific research and coordination of international cooperation for the needs of the Ministry of the Interior. Citizens' trust in the police and the integration of the police into society depend to a large extent on the education of police officers. Education includes the introduction of innovative methods and models and the maintenance of international police cooperation in the field of police education, exchange of experiences and knowledge. Research topics include community policing, police mindfulness, traffic issues, news in criminal investigations and changes in the application of relevant laws.

Every year, our institution organises an international scientific and professional conference called 'Police College Research Days' with current topics related to police work, law enforcement, news in criminal investigation and international police cooperation. This year the conference was to be held in April and called 'Police College Research Days – Understanding New Security Challenges', but given the current situation with COVID-19 at home and abroad, the conference was postponed. The organisation of the conference has been completed so when the safety and security conditions are right, the conference will be held.

What are your primary responsibilities as Vice Dean of the Police University College in Croatia?

There are two Vice Dean positions at our Police College. For one, the primary responsibility is to maintain the teaching process, and my primary responsibility is to maintain activities related to the international cooperation of the Police College with relevant international institutions in the field of education and science.

In this context, in accordance with the strategic goals of the Police College, my primary responsibility is to achieve cooperation and partnership, update and maintain existing ones, but also to create conditions for concluding new agreements on strategic cooperation in the field of higher education and scientific activity. Also, my responsibility is to take care of the professional and scientific training of teachers at the Police College.

I do the work of an Erasmus+ coordinator and chair the Research Ethics Committee. Regardless of the current function of Vice Dean, which is managerial, my primary work includes teaching and working with students and research. I teach two courses, Sociology of Crime and Crime Prevention. In addition to teaching, I also cooperate with police officers in the field and with the prevention service within the General Police Directorate in order to maintain the quality of teaching and to combine theory and practice in the field of crime prevention, sociology of police and crime.

What are the key areas of your current research and innovation? And what projects are you currently progressing that may be of interest to UK policing?

Of the international projects, I am currently participating in projects PROPHETS and ROXANNE, both funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme. PROPHETS (Preventing Radicalisation Online through the Proliferation of Harmonised Toolkit) is researching how individuals become radicalised and what kind of technology and tools may help to reduce cybercrime activities. The main goal is to prevent serious crimes by building resilience in people and society.

The ROXANNE (Real time netwOrk, teXt and speaker ANalytics for combating orgaNized crimE) project aims to unmask criminal networks and their members, as well as reveal the true identity of perpetrators by combining the capabilities of speech/language technologies and visual analysis with network analysis.

I am also a member of the Management Committee in the COST Action (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) project on the topic "Police Stop and Search". The main aim of the project is to exchange and deepen our knowledge and understanding the practices of police stops in Europe.

At the national level, I participate in the "Croatian Violence Monitor", a study of phenomenology, etiology and prosecution of delinquent violence with focus on protecting particularly vulnerable groups of victims as part of the Violence Research Lab and funded by Croatian Science Foundation and University of Zagreb Faculty of Law. The main goal is to study etiology, phenomenology and prosecution of delinquent violence to gain a detailed insight into violence in Croatia.

I am also engaged in a project to analyse the location of criminal offences, changes in the movement and structure of criminal offences in the area of the City of Zagreb and the Republic of Croatia during the last ten years. I manage this project in cooperation with colleagues from the Criminal Investigation Department and the National Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar. The aim of this research is to conduct an analysis of the locations of criminal offences in the City of Zagreb and the Republic of Croatia, as well as an analysis of changes in the structure and movement of committed criminal offences during the last 10 years.

Have any of the projects you have completed made a real positive impact upon the policing in Croatia?

Yes, absolutely, Project UNITY, designed to strengthen the connection between the police and their communities, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme, has created a new, community-centred approach to community policing by developing new tools, procedures and technologies that put people at the heart of identifying policing priorities and ensuring citizens are an integral part of informing sustainable solutions.

Unity was the first EU Horizon 2020 project where we participated as a full partner and it has developed and delivered a flexible and scalable citizen-focused community policing model which strengthens the effective engagement and cooperation between police forces and the communities they serve to create safer societies for all.

The results of the UNITY project are included in regular teaching lectures at the Police College, and in parallel with the theoretical part, activities are carried out on the full integration of tools into police education and work. These activities are carried out in cooperation with the company Rinicom ltd from Lancaster, a British partner in the UNITY project.

An impact from the Unity project is a book recently published by Springer entitled "Community Policing – A European Perspective. Strategies, Best Practices and Guidelines", and I am honoured to be one of the co-authors. This book is an excellent teaching material and is on the

list of teaching literature in the subject of crime prevention. CEPOL has included this book in its library too.

The PROPHETS and ROXANNE projects are still in the research and development phases of developing tools and therefore cannot be integrated into regular police work, but given the themes and approach to the project, I expect that they will be partially or fully integrated into the police system.

Nevertheless, some earlier projects such as the Twinning light project, strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Interior in the field of crime prevention between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Croatia have been successfully implemented within the police system.

The concrete result of this project produced the Guidelines for Crime Prevention, on the basis upon which police affairs are now fully integrated into the regular work of the police. The organisational units of our Ministry have the obligation to carry out preventive activities and apply the Guidelines for Prevention in the part that applies to them.

What was your role in Project Unity?

I was the project manager for Croatia and conducted our project Unity activities. It was my first experience of working in such a large project consortium consisting of 15 partners from 10 European countries. Considering that one of the goals was the development of a technological platform for communication between the police and citizens, we had strong support from the Ministry of Interior and colleagues from the Criminal Investigation Police Directorate, the Police Directorate, the Operational and Communication Centre and the VII Trešnjevka Police Station (Zagreb).

With such strong support we hosted a very successful hands on practical workshop in our Academy which contributed to the success of the project. Such horizontal involvement enabled a comprehensive approach to the project and the collection of quality information and proposals during the project itself. Given the fact that in Croatia it was one of the few projects in the field of research under the EU Horizon 2020 program in the field of secure societies, our national Agency for Mobility and EU programmes, included Unity project as a successful example of the project in the book published by the Agency.

Did you collaborate with any other police forces in Project Unity?

Yes, in the context of higher police education and research, we continue to work with the Police Department of the University of Applied Sciences for Public Service Bavaria and CENTRIC (Centre of Excellence in Terrorism, Resilience, Intelligence and Organised Crime Research) at Sheffield Hallam University. The Unity project provided a link for the involvement of our institution in COST funding for research and innovation networks.

How are you trying to incorporate the Unity project outputs into community policing of Croatia?

The Unity project is included in the education system at the level of higher education. The community policing book produced by Unity is an excellent and current teaching literature which gives further insights into how the primarily locally focused concept of community policing fits into an increasingly interconnected world. I try to incorporate the basic pillars of the Unity project (trust, information exchange, accountability and prevention) through lectures

to my students who will one day manage the police system. In 2018, we organised a meeting with police officers for community policing and prevention where we introduced them to the results of the UNITY project.

A technology platform for citizens and the police was also presented, which has not yet been implemented in the police system, but there were some efforts to integrate it into the system and connect it to the existing platform for e-alerts. Work on this is being carried out as part of the activities of Rinicom ltd from Lancaster and their Croatian partners.

What have been the challenges of integrating the research and innovation outputs of project Unity into community policing of Croatia?

There are ongoing challenges when it comes to new technology and a new modern approach to policing. The easier part of integration is related to the inclusion of research results in regular police education, while the implementation of technological solutions in day-to-day policing is always a bigger challenge for several reasons. These reasons are primarily financial planning, analysis of the acceptability of new information solutions, the level of security of police information and personal data, localisation of the technology platform and the appointment and training of police officers who will regularly work with citizens on the Unity platform.

What do you hope the outputs of Project Unity will achieve for community policing in Croatia?

I certainly hope that in the foreseeable future the results of the Unity project will enable a better and faster connection of police officers with citizens and other relevant stakeholders at the local, national and international levels. Such communication adapted to the times in which we live can certainly improve the relationship between citizens and the police and increase the level of security, safety and mutual trust, information exchange, accountability and prevention. We also hope that the success of UNITY and other EU projects will encourage wider participation of our colleagues in various collaborative international programmes.

What has been the role of community policing and civil protection during the COVID-19 crisis? And has Project Unity helped the police response in Croatia in anyway?

The joint work of representatives of relevant institutions (civil protection, the Institute of Public Health – epidemiologist, doctors, police) received great support from citizens and gained credibility. This is an example of trust building, timely information exchange, accountability, crime prevention, community cohesion, engagement and partnership – all Unity pillars of community policing – at national and local level. For example, local police and civil protection coordinate the implementation of Civil Protection Headquarters decisions of self-isolation of citizens, respect for decisions on the operation of various commercial buildings, restaurants, shops, crafts, etc. The role of the local police is to help if there is a need to take some powers that civil protection does not have, such as checking the identity of a person and other actions within police jurisdiction. Immediately after the decision was made to restrict movement to prevent the virus, a special group of police officers was formed, led by a police officer for community policing and prevention. They emphasise the importance of timely exchange and accuracy of data between relevant partners, including the Croatian Institute of Public Health, police, border police, sanitary inspectors, etc. The organisation of this work for COVID-19 is an example according to the principles of the Unity project, but adapted to the Croatian reality.

About the author

Assistant Professor Ruža Karlović, is a Vice Dean of the Police College for research, development and university study programme and a lecturer at the Police College, Zagreb, Croatia. She graduated in the field of criminal investigation in 2002 and received her PhD in sociology in 2012. Her research interests focus on police status and duties in society, crime prevention and sociology of crime. She has been involved in numerous international security and safety projects within H2020 Programme. She is currently the chair of the Ethics Committee and Erasmus+ coordinator at the Police College and is a member of the Expert Committee of the Croatian Police and Security Journal. In the field of police sciences, she has authored a number of articles, scientific papers, conference abstracts and books. She is a member of the European Society of Criminology (ESC).

Assistant Professor Ruža Karlović can be contacted via email: rkarlovic@fkz.hr. To learn more about the Police College in the Republic of Croatia click [here](#). Click the links to access the different projects and different work areas: [Project Unity](#), [PROPHETS](#), [ROXANNE](#), [COST Action for police stop and search](#) and the [Violence Research Lab in Croatia](#)