

Editorial

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Challenges of police training in democracy

The profound social crisis that our whole region is going through no doubt includes the shrinking of the social State and the emergence of an increasingly punitive one, as well as – in an apparent paradox – the discredit of the modern institutions that would be expected to shape the State of law. Undoubtedly, analyzing the conditions of the State requires understanding what is happening to the different institutions that support it, which contribute to the construction of social identities, citizen practices and the recognition of the human rights that we all are the subjects of, such as the school, the armed forces, political parties, labor unions, or the police.

In the particular case of Mexico, in the last decade the country has been drawn into a so-called war against drug trafficking that, far from bringing us closer to the end of a battle, has faced us with a horizon in which it is difficult to discern consistent and precise strategies to change the course and advance towards a country with a real democracy, in a clearly harsh and complex social environment where citizens find themselves torn between the search for dialog and paralysis before multiple insecurities.

Research conducted in Latin America on violence, crime, and insecurity point out that the reality we are going through – high levels of violence, inequality, corruption and death – would not be possible without the connivance and participation of the structure of the State. The configuration of a para-legality in several countries in or region is so deep that it necessarily sinks its roots in the alleged legality that conforms national States; that is, those networks, practices and relationships that take place *on the fringes* of the law are produced and happen *under the shelter* of the very structures of the different levels of government. They are not thus dissociated spheres but ones that maintain a certain interdependence they feed on, or else fringes that are anything but that, located at the center of what functions as the engine that drives social existence itself.

It is thus that from our perspective it becomes imperative to think about and generate a responsible and constructive dialog on the issues that are currently preventing us from experiencing fully public space, social links, undertaking professional projects, trusting our institutions and imagining a common national and regional project. We may suppose and propose paths that will lead to a reconfiguration of the spaces deteriorated by the crumbling of our institutions due to the lack of a shared sense of purpose, seeking their reconstruction and strengthening. And for this issue we propose to focus on the police as a fundamental institution of public life.

In particular, following the initiative of Dr. María Eugenia Suárez de Garay, *Dialogos sobre educación. Temas actuales en investigación educativa* suggests thinking of police training – which began to be proposed in the 1990s and is now part of the public agenda of most countries in

the region – as a process that goes beyond the work done in police academies and that entails, in any event, pedagogical proposals that seek not only a better performance of police agents *per se*, but also to strengthen the relationships that police subjects maintain with other actors of public life, which would have to be closer, with a recognition of human rights, and aiming to transform not only the police as a public institution but also the life of its members.

Since this journal's main focus is on education, we consider it essential to provide a space for the knowledge that has been generated on some of the processes now taking place in Latin America with regard to the professionalization of the police, and with it the rearrangement, transformation and strengthening of citizen security in our region, as well as the challenges it has faced. We believe that this is the time – which began decades ago – to stop seeing the police as an institution that confronts us and start thinking of it as one that we should approach to understand not only what it lacks and what it has been captive of, but also to provide it with a meaning shared in the light of the national project that drives us. Thus, we offer further knowledge together with analyses derived from empirical studies that explain some of the processes Latin America is experiencing through what is taking place in police reform.

According to the experts, this work has begun by recognizing the diversity of police systems and the particular social, political and cultural scenarios in which they exist. That is why the different elements available to think of the police reform required for their training and a renewed closeness to the citizens involve finding out the role played by the increase in common crime and organized crime, as well as the inertias, opacity and even corruption within police forces. We are sincerely thankful to doctor Suárez de Garay for her coordination of this issue and her initiative to invite us to think about issues that are still today considered unrelated to the field of education studies. Let us rethink, then, our own resistance to academic and social paradigm shifts.

We leave Issue 17, "Challenges of police training in democracy", in the hands of our readers, looking forward to a timely and necessary debate on how to recompose the police institution, encouraged by education as the framework for the possibility of transformation.

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