A scrutiny of the police's operating environment in Finland

Vesa Muttilainen
Director of research
Police University College of Finland, Tampere, Finland

Vesa Huotari
Senior researcher
Police University College of Finland, Tampere, Finland

Pauliina Potila
Lecturer
Police University College of Finland, Tampere, Finland

Abstract

The attention of the police has turned increasingly to the question of how to become smarter in accomplishing their tasks and in fulfilling their duties in society. The police services in most Western countries appear to follow the same path; the faith is invested in better strategies and approaches built upon systematically collected and thoroughly analysed data, which provide intelligence and result in more knowledge-intensive and thus also smarter policing. The various trends and tendencies in the police's operating environment are an obvious target for such a scrutiny. This article describes experiences from Finland in accomplishing such an analysis.

Keywords:

police, operating environment, education

Introduction

In recent years the Police University College of Finland has provided analyses of the development of the police's operating environment. The analyses were intended to increase awareness and provide knowledge of trends and tendencies to be used in the development of internal security, policing and police education in a variety of ways (cf. Cohen McGullough, D. and Spence, 2012; Policing for a Better Britain, 2013). However, it is important to notice that the police's operating environment does not solely refer to the

outside world, but also covers functions, features and practices that are internal to the police (e.g. Bryson, 1995).

We have asked a number of experts to write a brief analysis of a police-relevant theme reflecting their field of expertise. In the last 5 years this request has produced three published reviews comprising of about 80 articles altogether (Muttilainen and Potila, 2016; Muttilainen and Huotari, 2014; Honkonen and Muttilainen, 2012). The authors represent the Police University College, other universities and research institutions, the police administration and other areas of the public administration.

The editors have faced a difficult problem in seeing the forest for the trees, i.e. in figuring out the larger or more encompassing picture transcending individual analytic contributions and insights. However, there seem to be eight themes cross-cutting the latest two reviews.

Content of individual contributions

The articles in the reviews are based on research and statistics, other source material and personal expertise in the respective field of action. Most of them address a police-relevant topic directly, but others open up a more general view to a trend or tendency. The authors of the articles have been asked to describe the current state of the area of their interest, to comment upon it and draw out likely risks and challenges in it in terms of police work and policing.

The latest police's operational environment review was published in November 2016 (Muttilainen and Potila, 2016). The framework for the review reflects the division of research areas in the Police University College, i.e. police work and organisation, policing and the police in society. However, the review begins with a chapter outlining the framework of policing: the problems of the public administration; changes in the security architecture; reforms of the police organisation in Finland and other countries; and the development of the internal security agenda in the EU. A chapter on the theme of police work and organisation mainly analyses police competences and police education.

The articles describe ethical leadership, intelligence-led policing, stress management at police work, the use of simulations and work-based learning in police education.

The articles under the policing theme focus on surveillance and emergency response operations, crime investigation and various other forms of policing. The use of force by the police, uniformed police control and violence in close relationships are scrutinised in this chapter. The analyses also include topics such as: the control of secret information acquisition; the status of economic crime investigation; the investigation of sexual crimes against children; traffic safety measures; license services; and interaction in tactical

negotiations. The police within society theme consists of reviews describing security forecasting, criminal phenomena and the perspective of citizens. First, the prevention model for crime is examined, in addition to campus security in higher education institutions and the regional isolation of immigrants. The criminal phenomena scrutinised include the characteristics of hate crime, homicide trends and the risks posed by money laundering. The final two analyses deal with statutory mediation and citizens' assessments of the police.

Trends in the police's operating environment

This chapter contains reflections based on themes that either bring the articles together or intersect them. The 2016 review is not considered as a separate or independent compilation of articles on the operating environment of the police, but merely complements the previous reviews. The review published in 2014 concluded with making the four following points:

- **New competences to be used by the organisation:** Continuous change in the organisation, the legislation and the tools, requires a new kind of learning and an ability to adapt. The new bachelor-level degree for police officers, which expects both individual and communal capacity for critical reflection, and competences in research and development work, is also likely to raise expectations regarding the life and practices of police work. Competence requirements are increasing both vertically (special expertise in one's own area) and horizontally (wider sphere of cooperation, work in partnerships). The new competences possessed by police officers with a bachelor's degree must be put to proper use in their work organisations and by the work organisations too.

- **Slimming resources — new forms of operation:** The public economy is living through a time of scarcity and the police's own resources will suffice for increasingly less. This requires a new way of thinking in the definition of tasks perceived as essential to the police and in the attitude towards cooperation with other agencies and organisations. Once the police administrative structures have been reformed, this path cannot be expected to provide significant efficiency benefits in the future. Attention must be turned to police work and police employees. If the police are to fulfil their service obligations to civil society, they need to greater appreciate the assistance and expertise from it too in solving its security issues and problems.

- **Global information networks — threats and possibilities:** A considerable amount of people's time is currently spent using internet-based services. Developments in technology will produce increasingly new crime phenomena in data networks and increase the number of potential crime victims. Also, traditional crimes will be carried out via data networks and using new technology. This line of development will inevitably lead to an increasing part of policing taking place online. At best, technology can help enhance operations in a variety of ways. It facilitates the mining of register data and the

tracing of criminals' cash flows. The police can also receive help from online communities or citizens using mobile devices for resolving crimes.

- **A complex operating environment — a challenge to unity:** The environment in which the police operate is becoming increasingly transparent. The police will become more subject to debate, real-time evaluation and open criticism. Citizens are becoming increasingly aware of their own rights and the limits of the legal authority of the police. It is unlikely that the unity that has been a trademark of the police in Finland, will survive in its traditional form. Instead of every police officer representing a unitary bureaucratic stand on every issue, the approaches will provide for more professional, personal and situational ways in dealing with security problems.

These rather general conclusions described above have not lost their relevance. In fact, many of the articles in the 2016 review emphasise them too. However, the latter review highlights some issues unforeseen in the previous compilations:

- **Adaptability to complex problems:** In recent years, discussion of the security environment has often included references to the adaptability of organisations and individuals under the idea of resilience. The challenges requiring resilience have been described, for example, as difficult to resolve, scalable, complex and hybrid. The uncertainty can be compensated for with the ability to adopt new forms of operation; the use of technology; the creation of cooperative relationships; and the development of competences, expertise, the use of information and a service principle.

- **Information accumulated through operation to be put into use:** Police education and police practice utilise the information that derives from practical experience and the information that accumulates in operational police registers. The latter is used in descriptive statistics, research and development work, and as a source of intelligence in managing police resources and directing policing. However, the use of this data source is less advanced than, for example, in healthcare, where recommendations for professional practice are given on the basis of analysis of data from various registers.

- **The ethical foundation of police work within a constitutional state:** Ethics is one of the first principles in policing and the police provide an ethical role model in society. In Finland, the police are both trusted and respected. This partly reflects the strength of the rule of law, democratic principles and functioning of the justice system. The importance of the rule of law should be emphasised, especially when the conditions within the society become increasingly demanding. However, excessive control of public order may jeopardise basic human rights and individual freedoms that are the backbone of civil society.

- **New trends of immigration:** During the second half of 2015, the number of immigrants in Finland multiplied compared to the previous year. Mass immigration is a good example of a sudden and extensive phenomenon that forces authorities and other operators to

seek quick solutions in cooperation with each other. Authorities in Finland were criticised for being unable to predict the scale and schedule of immigration. However, these kinds of incidents, which unveil unpreparedness and lack of imagination, call for resilience, and will be a dimension in the police's operating environment that we are unlikely to fully exclude. Therefore, we must prepare ourselves for their arrival in a versatile manner by developing competences, forms of operation and cooperation, and partnerships with others that are suitable for a variety of situations.

Conclusions

The reviews of the police's operating environment already cover several important and police-relevant themes and issues, while new themes and dimensions are likely to emerge in the future. The articles cast light on a number of essential aspects of the context, which put the police's strategic and operational skills under a severe test currently and in the near future. Most of the insights are based on recent research and development projects or publications on topics that are important in society. The analytical scrutiny of the changes in the operating environment is functionally significant for the police. In addition to the themes that have been under public discussion, it is good to also pay attention to what is not discussed or is only discussed minimally. For example, license services and traffic safety measures are an aspect of policing that are easily overlooked when compared with terrorism, cyber threats, mass immigration and organised crime. Besides, external risks and threats often receive more attention in the field of security work than issues, risks and threats related to the internal operating environment of organisations. The objective of the reviews on the police's operating environment and, more widely, forecasting, is to describe the probable future in a way that prepares us to face it or increases our potential to avoid undesired chains of events through actions performed today (e.g. Dufva, 2015). Not everything, however, can be anticipated; chance always has an impact on the development of the operating environment. The security of the future must, to some extent, be built on the basis of uncertain information.

Without doubt our interpretations of the challenges ahead reflect national policy initiatives and strategies in policing. Perhaps it is challenging to see it from some distance, and to provide a comprehensive, coherent, synthetic picture of it from there (e.g. Fyfe et al., 2013). While the main challenges analysed in this article are typical to Finland, they are also trends and tendencies that are shared by other national and local systems of policing too. No country is an island when it comes to global challenges and international crime. Actually, a joint international effort is needed to paint an adequate picture of the challenges ahead. This article is thus also an initiative for increased cooperation in analysing the operating environment of the police in a less local framework and, perhaps, manner too.

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