

# How do German and French police forces know (differently)?

## Bringing together different knowledge cultures through ethnographic explorations

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### Introduction

Throughout Europe and North America, police services are increasingly turning towards proactive, problem-orientated approaches. Some cultivate what is called ‘intelligence-led policing’ — even down to the local level. The research hinges on this general trend in order to renew the understanding of the practical relations of local knowledge and organisational knowledge, especially in the field of security. It focuses on an important aspect of practical police work and scientific research alike: the translation and mobilisation of ad hoc (local) knowledge into organisational knowledge. The CODISP project analyses and compares the knowledge cultures that evolve with the prevalent demands of preventive, proactive and problem-orientated policing. It does so in order to initiate and support actual organisational investments into the strengthening of the ‘intelligence function’, as well as into the professionalisation and the ‘infrastructure’ (Pan and Scarbrough 1999) of this now omnipresent branch of police work

Our research looks at the ways in which local knowledge is gathered and translated — or should at times not be translated — into intelligence that matters for local security networks and policies. And, conversely, we aim to determine how and to what extent this intelligence that is rendered available organisationally can be subject to learning and appropriation by professionals who undertake operational and supervising missions.

Moreover, the research assesses the impact of the practical implementation of organisational process, tools and systems, which can be considered as components of the ‘intelligence function’ inside police services, as well as the effect of the use by police organisations of knowledge which has been produced by other local actors who share information with the police. To put it simply, the project studies to what extent and how, within Germany and France, knowledge-led policing tools and systems can make their way into various epistemic cultures of police units, and how these tools and systems are employed by police to respond to new demands of problem-orientated, preventive and proactive policing?

### Intelligence doctrine in context

According to the literature, collecting, managing, analysing and exploiting information related to security has become a central aspect in daily police work: to the extent that sociologists now describe police officers as ‘knowledge workers’ (Haggerty & Ericson, 2005, 2000, 1997). Similarly, information is considered as a ‘general paradigm of ordinary police activities’ (Brodeur, 2003). Police agencies are assessed as ‘learning organisations’ that cultivate more or less restricted knowledge economies. However, the police cannot be preconceived as one homogenous body. ‘Personal knowing’ and ‘organisational knowledge’

(Hughes & Jackson 2004) remain distinct and necessary epistemic qualities within the organisation.

### A new police doctrine

Since the beginning of the 2000s, a research movement on police activities has been specifically focusing their studies on the relationship between knowledge and action when dealing with security problems. This collection of works, essentially Anglo-Saxon, proclaimed a new police doctrine: intelligence-led policing. Until today, however, this doctrine caused conceptual problems. Is it a separate mode of policing? Or is it a component next to others in rather traditional modes (Ratcliffe 2003)? Is it just a new managerial discourse which remains largely disconnected from the common 'case approach' process of knowledge construction in law enforcement organisations? What is more: are there functional equivalents of the Anglo-Saxon notion of 'law enforcement intelligence' in terms of knowledge management within the French and German police, such as local knowing or knowledge networks? Our research envisages these conceptual matters as empirical questions: how do the French and German police services respond to the new knowledge demands/offers that come about especially with preventive and proactive police work?

The academic studies on the doctrine of intelligence-led policing emphasise the role of information gathering and analysis in the management of police activities and in the governance of security policies. They focus on how police organisations discover, recognise, categorise, interpret and understand the various issues relating to safety, crime and disturbance of public order. They examine how the development of an 'intelligence function' can influence the functioning and outputs of police organisations, but also, more broadly, the governance of local security policies. The research moves these approaches back to daily police work and, in doing so, considers the potentials and limitations of new forms (and doctrines) of knowledge-management practices.

These knowledge-management practices within the police involve a range of activities which aim to:

- collect and manage relevant information for the actors in charge of prevention and security issues;
- assess the threat level represented by these issues in order to determine what problems have to be targeted as a priority;
- produce and distribute knowledge about these issues to elaborate practical solutions and their implementation;
- evaluate the impact of the actions taken.

Knowledge management should confer upon local actors a pragmatic understanding of situations and problems that can be turned into action strategies (Lemieux, 2006). It should also solicit suggestions and approaches to crime reduction. The knowledge, or intelligence, should increase the capacity to anticipate critical situations, misdemeanors and disorders. They should also allow stakeholders to rationalise the use of their resources. The latter should focus their attention and efforts on the problems that most contribute to the deterioration of security. Knowledge management not only aims to increase the quality of information released to decision-makers, but also to increase their ability to use the analysis results elaborated especially for them.

As Jerry Ratcliffe (2002) indicates, the introduction of intelligence-led policing initiatives seem to encourage police organisations to go beyond a narrow and reactive conception of raw information exploitation, characterised by the predominance of information that derives from citizen complaints and criminal enquiries, which are both are collected after incidents have happened. The doctrine, in line with problem-centred policing, prefers a comprehensive and proactive conception, which allows for a preventive attitude towards various forms of criminality and public disorder.

Beyond the police force, all public actors likely to contribute to insecurity reduction are to evolve towards more 'proactive' and 'strategic' action modes. In such a system, there is a great need for active information research and scientific problem analysis, just like there is a need to calculate the best value costs/advantages for operational measures set up to respond to the problems (Maguire, 2000; Maguire & John, 2006). In general, the new forms of policing demand security management where profitability and performance have become essential parameters (Lemieux, 2006). This evolution fits into a wider movement of 'managerialisation' of public policies (Delpeuch, 2006),

and brings about new legal, professional and practical problems caused by rising bureaucracy and formality.

### The implementation of the doctrine in various countries

Great Britain is in the vanguard of the international movement of intelligence-led policing doctrine. In 2004, it set up a National Intelligence Model (NIM, the result of a study started in 2000) whose task was to standardise and promote new knowledge practices and tools. Information ought to be processed at three interconnected levels: local, regional and national. Each level has been equipped with its own intelligence management tools — intelligence units, various committees where police chiefs can gain knowledge about the ‘burning problems’ from analysts and from representatives of other public and private organisations. Additionally, each level has been asked to adopt a learning attitude towards its own routines and work practices. The police services are expected to function as branches of a learning organisation.

In the United States, since the 11 September 2001 attacks, police forces have been encouraged by federal authorities to carry out reforms based on the intelligence-led policing doctrine. A national development programme has been set up with the aim of modernising equipment, improving professional training, generalising good practices, and sharing information between police agencies at different levels. The American doctrine implies that all local police forces — whatever their size and organisation mode — should develop the ability to manage and efficiently exploit the information gathered from an extensive range of open and closed sources, as well as transmit the knowledge generated from that information to the internal and external actors who most need it to carry out their security tasks. Local police must also be able to receive, manage and build on information coming from external institutional sources. All the components of police organisation are hard-pressed to acquire a culture of information (Carter, 2004). The intelligence-led policing doctrine in the United States is in line with the problem-solving approaches that came about in the 1990s and which consist of identifying the causes of security problems using tools and analysis methods that enable the development of responses towards the actual causes of criminality and public disorder. Some experts criticise problem-orientated policing for failing

because of a lack of analytical capacities inside police organisations (Eck and Spelman, 1989). Intelligence-led policing promised to overcome these shortcomings.

By contrast, in France, the interest in intelligence-led policing has only emerged recently and partially. Interest arose when the system of national security intelligence was reformed in 2007 and 2008. Since then, new intelligence tools were created to provide local police services with analytical products which are supposed to improve decision processes for operational and tactical purposes. However, the efficiency of the tools and methods largely remains to be assessed until today. And, the know-how that has been constituted either at the central level or in the context of local initiatives, needs in order to be spread across the country, a broad and rich conceptual apparatus that allows any assessment to identify functional equivalents in police knowledge management. Here, our heuristic distinction of local and organisational knowledge and the analysis of their translation into each other marks out a valuable starting point for grounded research.

One of the prominent aspects of French intelligence know-how, which should be carefully compared with similar German experiences, is the emergence of deliberative forms of information aggregation and problem analysis which have gradually emerged from the development of local security partnerships since the beginning of the 1980s. These forms of joint production of law enforcement intelligence take place in various local security committees, information-sharing networks and bilateral inter-institutional cooperations. These partnerships associate actors such as municipalities, courts, social services, schools, public transportation and housing projects etc. Their degree of formalisation and institutionalisation varies depending on the sites and on the issues. On the whole, they have allowed actors characterised by different knowledge cultures, professional interpretation frameworks and institutional interests to learn how to exchange information and how to discuss possible responses to the issues. In many French localities, the inter-organisational sharing of information and analysis has become an established practice which influences the decision-making process in the organisations which are integrated in security networks. In some

territories, these practices have strongly contributed to improving the outcomes of local security policies.

In the case of Germany, the research is confronted with another diverse picture. The police is administered on the state level, complemented by self-organised networks in the municipalities. Here, local security concepts gave rise to an enormous diversity of projects, themselves specialised on 'burning issues', on 'hotspots' with a mix of security/criminality matters or on 'target groups'. Through these initiatives, preventive/proactive policing grew to be an important part of daily police work. Now, it does not just collaborate with social work, but shares some of its social properties, including its client-centred perspective. This transformation of police work caused new demands on the level of education, as well as new demands for the organisational culture as such. In terms of knowledge work, these developments towards proactive policing have been managed rather on the project level, less within the police organisation as a whole. German police schools aim to meet these new demands in terms of social learning and reflection (such as anti-racism training). The dimensions of knowledge work and 'learning organisations' — plus their inherent limitations — await further attention.

In the German context, because of the heterogeneous and decentralised structure of the police services, intelligence-led policing never turned into a paradigm or doctrine in the first place. If at all, intelligence-led policing has been reserved for special analytical units at the federal level. For instance, the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) — together with European partners — developed techniques of 'geographical and strategic early detection' in order to 'reveal connections between different phenomena' and 'to prepare the police force to make steps in terms of setting objectives, planning strategies and prioritising policies' ([www.cepol.europa.eu](http://www.cepol.europa.eu)). However, such scenario techniques, differentiated by types of delinquency, seem to overburden local security networks. On a daily level, 'intelligence' seems restricted to ad hoc risk assessments involving an intimate understanding of participants and their 'normal' actions. Local police work focuses on — careful, acceptable, operational — networking, the building of trust relationships, and at times the advancement of its applied, organisational knowledge economy. It is more knowledge-led than intelligence-led.

## Analysing knowledge-led policing in France and Germany

Some sociologists see knowledge-led or intelligence-led policing as a managerial discourse which, deep down, is unlikely to alter mundane vision and thinking in the police force. In their opinion, the police force is still a profession orientated more towards coercive action than towards analysis and reflection. Police activities essentially remain focused on reactive responses to occasional events reported to them or detected by them. The function of intelligence, as these researchers observe, is only effectively instrumental in a minimal number of police events and cases (Brodeur & Dupont, 2006). Several authors doubt it would be possible to rationalise information circulation and exploitation in police organisations, as intelligence is traditionally exchanged in an informal and personal manner often reproduced by the dominant mechanisms in professional learning and transmission practices (Manning, 2003; Shearing & Ericson, 1991).

But there are several reasons to consider the emergence of knowledge-led policing as a major expression of a paradigm shift in the field of security policies. Local networks in public security have evolved significantly. Hypothetically, they render intelligence systems more useful and applicable: territorialisation of public action, generalisation of contractual and partnership initiatives and widening (through different forms of mediation, prevention and citizen involvement) of the range of responses to be used in dealing with security problems. In such a context, for local security policies to be effective, the knowledge economy needs to fulfil a number of requirements: the capacity to understand local specificities, the aptitude to share pertinent information with local public and private partners, collective deliberation of the significance of collected data, as well as the capacity to use shared information and knowledge for the joint elaboration of coordinated action strategies. Moreover, the doctrine expects police organisations to improve their effectiveness despite their decreasing means, which invites them to equip themselves with knowledge tools in order to make better use of the resources already obtained by members of the organisation on various levels.

## A comparative approach to studying knowledge-based policing and the ways to improve it

Our comparative study take on these managerial changes will contribute to these debates on a substantial basis: firstly by comparing the various national articulations of an international doctrine as such; secondly, by showing how exactly the status of various knowledge in institutionally diverse police organisations; thirdly, our grounded research will specify the practical relevancy of knowledge environments and knowledge tools beyond mere self-descriptions of the respective police services. Our aim is to come close to the complex and integrated police work and to introduce basic improvements for these situations.

Comparing the French and the German cases lies at the heart of this endeavour. The comparison is performed in four steps:

- (1) Mapping the fields: we map our respective fields according to the organisational structures, hierarchy levels, programmes of good practice and formal/procedural paths. The institutional maps are used as patterns of possibility, meaning as a framework that shows how certain modes of knowing and forms of knowledge are feasible at certain sites within the respective organisation. This includes prescriptions for the aggregation, storage and compiling of data, the use of electronic format versus paper copies and reports, etc.
- (2) Grounded practice research: on these grounds, we organise our practice research. We place field researchers in selected sections of policing, where they will conduct a lengthy thorough ethnographic observation of the daily knowledge work (4-6 weeks in each setting). These sections are confronted differently with the requirements of knowledge-led policing. They serve these requirements differently according to the practical, local limitations that are themselves to be taken seriously as pragmatic tactics and rationales. Only on these informed grounds do we develop semi-standardised interviews in other cities and on various hierarchy levels: we conduct a series of 1-2 week 'short studies' of 10-15 particular localities in each country, mainly based on interviews and documentary analysis, as well as a series of visits in police academies in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States.
- (3) Thick comparison: grounded in the local police work, we discern relevant patterns and factors of knowledge-led policing. This assures that the research is empirically driven; that it links up on the actual experiences and competencies of practitioners. This way, we will thicken our research in this bottom-up methodology: from real cases (fieldwork research) to general organisational patterns (semi-standardised interviews).
- (4) Integrating basic analytical perspectives on knowledge in learning organisations: the literature on learning organisations starts from two basic analytical perspectives. It focuses either on knowledge production or on knowledge consumption. Our research integrates these two directions in order to compare the info- and infrastructures in diverse police organisations. The analytical questions are: what local knowledge is produced within security networks and how, if at all, does this knowledge circulate in the police organisation? Is knowledge produced for, or consumed by ways of geo-coding analysis, criminal investigative analysis, tactical crime analysis (pattern identification relevant for the deployment of the patrols) and strategic analysis (for resource allocation of personnel and materials), etc.?
- (5) Comparing practical solutions: our joint research projects aims for best practice cases in order to analyse in detail the practical solutions that made these successes possible. The practical solutions will be presented in workshops to academics and, more so, police practitioners from France and Germany. By narrating and analysing these positive cases, we aim for new intern organisational publics that allow knowledge to circulate more freely to those members that are in need of a broader repertoire of practical solutions.
- (6) Results, diagnostic and applied: as a result we will be able to characterise the respective epistemic cultures of policing beyond mere national containers. Parts of these cultures are programmes, techniques, professional solutions and attitudes towards knowledge production/consumption.

Knowledge-led policing is put in context(s) by then and can be reformulated as a doctrine in more realistic and embedded terms. Rather than celebrating doctrines, we will downsize them to their actual potential and limitations.

### Identifying good practices in the field of public security intelligence

Scientific works dedicated to the doctrine of intelligence-led policing have underlined four types of pitfall for organisations that try to increase the role of the intelligence function in managing their everyday activities: (1) the agents' reluctance to adopt formalised and standardised modes of information conservation and transmission; (2) tensions between operational and specialised police forces on the level of empirical methods and data assessments; (3) the difficulty of obtaining resources in order to implement intelligence-led infrastructures in organisations already saturated by multiple demands, and finally, (4) the difficulty of producing valuable information and up-to-date diagnoses for day-to-day policing.

Our research investigates these tensions between the doctrines and the ground work plus the ways in which these tensions are translated into everyday dealings and routines. More generally, our research will renew the understanding of public action development and behaviour processes in the security field, focusing on an aspect of local management that is often overlooked in police management literature: the institutional processes of (ad hoc) fabrication, (biased) interpretation, (limited) circulation and (pragmatic) utilisation of operational knowledge, including the paradigmatic conflicts and paradigms accompanying these processes.

In addition, we isolate the conditions and processes which enhance learning and allow the use of concepts, thinking modes, work methods and technical tools inherently linked to public security intelligence, by local security actors. The comparison of these components will assist the grounded modelling of learning organisations in the field of policing.

Moreover, our joint research will qualify the human dimension of the processes by which the knowledge systems of the function of intelligence operates. Previous research suggests that even if more and

more sophisticated tools are made available to agents involved in this function, improving professional capacities constitutes the first condition necessary for the enhanced production/consumption — and circulation — of knowledge.

In order to analyse the organised processes of knowledge production/consumption, we aim to answer rather detailed research questions:

- Within the organisations and services taking part, how do the different types of concerned agents mobilise the resources given by the function of intelligence? In the solving of which situations and problems is organisational knowledge considered in-/appropriate?
- What actors are receptive to the offered knowledge and methods? How do they justify the use of organisational knowledge and what drives/delimits their knowledge production for the organisation? How does career profile, training and professional experience matter?
- Conversely, which actors passively or actively resist the development of the function of intelligence? How do they explain and justify this resistance? How can we utilise the critique in order to offer more appropriate knowledge systems that meet the ethical, legal and social requirements highlighted by these local critiques?

We ask the same questions in our two respective fields and we endeavour to determine the practicalities and local conditions that promote or, on the contrary, inhibit the coproduction of knowledge in prevention projects, municipal initiatives and task forces.

The reconstruction of knowledge practices and processes implies that there is a limited and ordered range of principles, rules and procedures applied by the police forces. They acquire certain rules and sources, appreciate them in their local relevance, turn situated experiences into decontextualised data, bring some (not all) data into circulation, share some (not all) data with other units, update some knowledge in the light of new insights and demands, and frequently reflect on the limitations of their methods — at times by using scientific support. Furthermore, knowledge processes are subject to forms of accountability as a technique to render them available to organisational and managerial oversight. We study these realms as distinct epistemic sub-cultures that are only partially integrated on an

organisational and systemic level. The recurring urge for transparency within the intelligence doctrines is a forceful expression of these fragmentations, including micro-politics and the struggles accompanying it.

In police organisations, the quality of knowledge and analysis processes depends on the weight given to them by its factions and sub-cultures. Knowledge is itself objected to interpretative struggles and competing schemata. The factions qualify or disqualify knowledge — and allow for additional enquiries or upfront usage. In particular, units who have special access to the best sources (e.g. operational units) must get used to transmitting information to knowledge systems: in a selective manner (screening out unreliable or useless information), in the necessary format, with the adequate level of detail, while observing a certain number of precautions. All this refers to the wider, but fragmented epistemic culture, in which knowledge and knowledge processes are weighed against each other.

Our own attempts to stabilise and rationalise knowledge-led policing in public security refer to an existing nexus of research in the workplace, management, information and policing studies. In terms of its development at the level of local actor networks, several works (Donzelot & Wyvekens, 1998; INTERSECTS study) have shown that the viability of partnership systems depend on their aptitude in stabilising and sharing procedures that encourage exchange productivity, fuel trust and direct inter-organisational conflicts. The latter involves efforts to assess the needs and capacities of network partners and to establish exchanges within such a system (diagnosis, consultation, performance monitoring, implementation of adequate technical tools, conditions to be respected in terms of confidentiality and compliance with the rights and liberties of citizens, etc.). However, the formalities and complexities of these knowledge exchanges encourage an 'underlife' (Goffman 1961) that crosscuts the procedural realm for pressing purposes.

Our research contributes to these demands by adding up an inventory of the good practices (more or less) effectively implemented by interior security forces and partnership bodies, both French and German, in the public security intelligence sector. It will examine in detail the functioning of units, services, organisations

and partnership networks which have demonstrated a strong capacity to obtain, analyse and efficiently exploit information and knowledge in local security problems. Moreover, it will draw lessons for both countries on the reflections and experience developed in the other country. This inventory in both countries will constitute a repertoire of 'ready to use' elements in the elaboration of a general public security intelligence doctrine. The communication of this inventory to professionals in local settings will take the form of a 'practical solutions and best practices directory'.

Any knowledge-led policing involving both local and organisational knowledge, implies a whole range of professional skills: organising and stimulating knowledge sharing within police services and partnership networks, knowing how to deal with and exploit information provided by partners, being capable of a constructive dialogue with partners with regard to information interpretation, knowing how to identify the likely characteristics of problems in a perspective of prevention, defending the viewpoints of one's own institution and collectively assessing the results of taken actions, etc. These skills need to travel within the organisation in order to provide a solid and broad foundation for a knowledge system to work.

The objective of the research is, thus, to supply police services with a professional arena and public dedicated to turning knowledge processes and the involved methods into objects of internal reflection and collective design. To that end, the research will assess the existing training courses in France and Germany in the public security intelligence sector, so as to supply police schools with practice-informed elements to enrich training modules. The emphasis and the critique of knowledge-led policing thus involve the early stages of human resources development: recruitment, job descriptions, skill standards career profiles. It involves, moreover, a critical culture that involves boundary work within the organisation and towards potential partners and audiences 'outside'.

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