

# EVENT POLICING – DIALOGUE IN THE POLICING OF MASS EVENTS IN DENMARK



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## Abstract

*This article describes a training programme for the 'Event Police' developed through cooperation between researchers at Aarhus University and East Jutland Police, Denmark. The Event Police and the associated training programme is a research-based initiative. It is designed to enhance the policing of major events and is an approach developed from the latest knowledge on the social psychology of crowds and police good practice.*

## Background

Since the mid 1990s, the police in Denmark have mainly used variations of the 'Mobile Concept' in the policing of crowds. The concept is integrated on a national level and uses police vehicles and squads of police officers with protective equipment to achieve strategic objectives through police capability for rapid mobility and the use of force. The concept has proved to be effective on many occasions including high-risk football matches and demonstrations, whilst also ensuring that police officers feel safe within the highly stressful contexts of disorderly and threatening crowds. However, some unforeseen consequences have become apparent because the approach does not promote dialogue between the police and those in the crowd. This lack of capability for dialogue, in turn, undermines a) the ongoing gathering and validation of information about potential risks to public order during an event; b) police capability to achieve negotiated solutions to unexpected incidents (Rasmussen, Havelund & Tranegaard 2009, Rasmussen & Havelund 2010). This limitation, therefore, inadvertently increases risks and increases the potential for police use of force against the crowd, which can lead to an unnecessary escalation of a situation (e.g. Stott & Drury 2000) instead of a peaceful de-escalation.

## Research in intergroup dynamics

The Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behavior (ESIM) developed by Stephen Reicher, John Drury and Clifford Stott working in the UK is now the dominant theoretical model of crowd psychology available in the scientific literature. According to this model, individuals act collectively in a crowd on the basis of a shared psychological group affiliation or social identity. This social identity, therefore, determines how a crowd will behave. The key issue is that the nature of the social identity, and hence collective action, in a

crowd can change rapidly as a consequence of police action. In particular, studies show that otherwise peaceful crowd members become collectively 'violent' where they find the actions of the police illegitimate (Reicher et al. 2007, Stott & Reicher 1998).

Correspondingly, a series of studies of the management of high-risk football crowds have shown that there is an increased likelihood of perceptions of police illegitimacy emerging among crowds in situations where the police have not been capable of conducting ongoing and dynamic risk assessments. The absence of this 'real-time' information can then lead the police to take an unnecessarily confrontational and undifferentiated stance towards a high-risk crowd in a context where there is no or low actual risk to public order. This imbalance between police tactical profile and risk creates the conditions for 'riots' to emerge. On the other hand, when the police are more capable of such real-time dynamic risk assessments they can and do respond more appropriately. In particular, police are more capable of being differentiated in the use of force and, therefore, of avoiding the kinds of interactions known to be associated with the escalation of disorder. This latter form of policing appears to be effective because it promotes perceptions of police legitimacy and increases the level of self-policing – or 'self-regulation' – among those within the crowd (see Stott & Pearson 2007 for an overview).

Recent research on developments in public order policing in Sweden suggests that if the police have a thorough knowledge of the persons they are dealing with and are in constant dialogue with them before, during and after a crowd event, the probability that widespread 'disorder' will emerge decreases (e.g. Holgerson 2010). Correspondingly, research conducted by the Aarhus University, Denmark suggested that the extent to which police can achieve the proportionate use of force and maintain

perceptions of police legitimacy among crowds is increased through dialogue and communication. This research also observed that football spectators defused potential 'flash points' themselves because dialogue between the supporters and the police had increased perception of police legitimacy even among high-risk elements of the crowd (Rasmussen & Havelund 2010).

### **The Event Police training programme**

This body of research and theory constitutes the conceptual foundation of the Event Police and their associated training programme in Denmark. The strategic aim of the unit is to apply the above-mentioned research and theory to the policing of crowds in Denmark. To support this operational development it was at first necessary to explore the viability of this concept through the development of a specific unit within the East Jutland Police dedicated to creating and maintaining dialogue throughout high-risk crowd events. The Event Police officers represent in many ways the police force in Denmark, although they might be more experienced than average. Most of them were part of the Mobile Concept some years ago and most of them have experience in community policing.

The role of Aarhus University was to evaluate these units and support the East Jutland Police in developing and delivering a training course for these units, the first of which took place during the spring of 2010. This training course combined lectures, group work, operational planning, deployment and field-based observation. The curriculum was based on published scientific research on ESIM and the role of the theory in supporting the development of successful approaches to the handling of crowds such as Euro 2004 in Portugal and the Swedish Dialogue police (Stott & Pearson 2007). On the first two days a series of lectures was provided outlining ESIM. In workshops during the introductory classes, time was taken to discuss the opportunities

and barriers for the police to implement an approach focused on dialogue in practice.

On day three, a process was introduced that aims to integrate the theory with operational practice as this relates to the policing of a high-risk crowd event. This was achieved by giving the group responsibility for planning their own tactical deployment rather than having this deployment determined for them by the senior tactical commander. On this occasion, the Event Police were, therefore, granted more influence than was normal, which among other things broke the normal hierarchical structure of the mobile concept outlined above. At the same time this 'delegation of responsibility' was designed to provide the Event Police officers with a sense of ownership of the concept, which subsequently appeared to be an important factor for its success. The task on day four was actual operational deployment throughout a high-risk match in the Danish football Premier Division ("Superliga"). The last day of the training then took place approximately one week after the event. This session was spent critically analyzing and evaluating their operational deployment on match day and relating this back to their pre-event learning. On this occasion, the critical self-evaluation is enhanced by research conducted during the event by the research team from Aarhus (which includes interviews with football fans as well as semi-structured field observations) and supplemented with relevant video material being used as necessary. The central aim of this final day is to identify good practice and feed this back into an adjustment and improvement of the overall concept.

## Conclusion

The experiences from the first round of the training programme are very positive. The training led to a high degree of reflection among the Event Police officers about their own role in policing crowds. The discussions moved from an initial focus on the use

of force and the mobile concept for controlling crowds through to a more focused and nuanced view of dialogue as a stand-alone tactical concept effective for managing crowd dynamics. Additionally, officers were able to articulate sophisticated ways of integrating dialogue successfully with the mobile concept. The evidence also suggests that supporters responded very positively to the Event Police officers and, most importantly, the high-risk match was policed without any significant problems emerging. The Police Force of East Jutland, under the jurisdiction of the Danish National Police, has, as a consequence of these successful outcomes, been given the go-ahead to continue educating Event Police officers in partnership with Aarhus University. Meanwhile, the Danish National Police are working on implementing a variant of the training programme at a national level. The training programme and the concept itself are continuously under development, but it is evident already that it has implications for other policing functions. As such, attempts are being made to integrate ideas from the event policing training programme into other areas of operational practice and training.

The aims of this training programme are to develop an approach based on scientific theory and dialogue, but the intention is to reduce the number of situations involving increased risk to public order and, therefore, to decrease the demand such events make on police resources. Ultimately, the East Jutland Police Force hopes that by using an 'evidence and theory' based approach it may be able to save on resources over the longer term.

## Literature

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## POLICE VERSUS CIVILIANS - GROWING TENSIONS IN THE DUTCH PUBLIC DOMAIN 1985–2005



By

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### Abstract

*In the Netherlands many people are complaining that the social climate has been hardening in recent years. This may be illustrated by the increasing number of conflicts between civilians and police officers. Using the archives of the Dutch National Ombudsman, we are trying to establish the extent to which such a tendency actually exists. These archives form an important source of information, as the Ombudsman is charged with addressing complaints from civilians about the behaviour of the police. Our investigation of more than 50 dossiers from the last 25 years suggests that tension between the police and the public is indeed growing. The discrepancy between the behaviours of civilians and those of police officers has made it difficult for either party to understand the other. As a result, escalation has become more likely. The central question of this paper is, therefore: is it possible to establish a pattern of change in relations between police and civilians over the last twenty-five years in the Netherlands? If so, which factors have contributed to these changes? Are civilians becoming increasingly aggressive, having lost respect for the police? Alternatively, are the police increasingly expecting that civilians will behave themselves, and are they becoming less tolerant of contradiction?*

### Keywords