

FROM THE EDITORS: CONTRIBUTING TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF POLICE SCIENCE AND RESEARCH IN EUROPE



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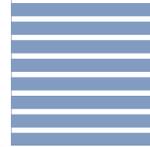
The science, theory or study of police and policing is gaining its own and deserved place in the scientific *academia*. The first formulations of 'police science' emerged during the 18th century (Del Barrio Romero et al., 2009) and several police and policing theories developed since that period are accepted today as *valid* or, at least, as not entirely *false* (Popper, 1959). Scientific theories supporting well-known police and policing models are more or less familiar to most contemporary police officers – that is, models like 'high visibility patrolling', 'hotspot policing', 'event-oriented policing', 'targeted preventive arrest', 'professional policing', 'problem-oriented policing', 'community policing', 'zero-tolerance policing', 'intelligence-led policing', 'evidence-based policing', 'cost-benefit policing', 'diversity policing', 'pulling-levers policing', 'context-oriented policing' and 'predictive policing'. The same can be said to most scientific theories supporting what is today's forensics, or criminalistics.

Besides the building up and the accumulation of experience-based knowledge, the last decades have witnessed a remarkable advancement in police research based on systematic observation, measurement and experiment, and the formulation, testing and modification of hypothesis. The Global Police database has documented more than 7000 controlled design studies and there are many more qualitative and ethnographic studies. Police scientists, researchers and practitioners moved away

from prescriptive-ideological *theories* – on what police and policing *should be*, for example – and become increasingly interested in evidence on what police and policing models work or don't work, and *why*, across Europe and other continents.

Assuming there are several possible *democratic* police and policing theories and models, the empirical testing of such theories and models has become more and more frequent in countries in Europe and outside Europe. On the one hand the 'what works or evidence-based policing' movement (Stanko & Dawson, 2016) has focused on the operational impacts of policing, on the other hand, others have posed the question 'what really matters in policing?' (Van Dijk, Hoogewoning & Punch, 2015). Taking these two approaches together, "does it really work and matter under any condition and in any context?" is a question for which scientists, researchers and practitioners are increasingly requiring an answer.

However, further advances are being restrained by the inherent complexity of societies and of police and policing. Theories unable to state that a police or policing model will *only* work if specific variables or sets of variables, including contextual or *national* ones, are active are undoubtedly still *weak* theories. The same applies to theories that are unable to predict how the absence of a given variable, or of a set of variables, will affect a model's performance. Such theories are not



necessarily, as they often are coined, *false* – but, for police practitioners, such theories certainly are *weak* and probably still *useless* ones. What makes a theory *robust* and *attractive* to police practitioners is the ability to provide the most probable, verifiable and valid explanation for how and why something happened – and also the ability to predict what will most probably occur when and if a given variable or a set of variables is present and active.

Systematic testing, at national, regional and local levels, is one of the solutions for overcoming one of the major weaknesses of police science and research. Police and policing models rarely can be designed in order to be scientifically tested before being fully implemented. A number of European countries have national legal frameworks and law enforcement systems where ‘experiments’, involving testing a treatment in a randomised experiment are difficult to implement. As a result, innovations may only be scientifically tested (evaluated) *post facto* and without an adequate control group.

Isolating, from what happened along an implementation process, which variables or sets of variables were necessary and sufficient for the observed results demands quality and time-consuming research methods and instruments – as well as comparisons of what happened in contexts where the *stimulus*, the police or policing model, was absent. That is, and most of the times, in other (similar) countries. Cross-national comparisons for controlling purposes are therefore crucial – but yet not enough.

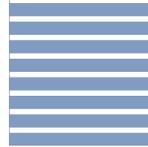
Testing a police or policing model in different countries, with different legal frameworks and different law enforcement systems and organizations is a second and necessary validation step. Without this step, the *why* a model did or didn’t work will remain an unanswered question. Accumulated cross-national evidence on *which* variables or set of variables are necessary and sufficient for a police or policing model to produce a given result is what allows stating how *robust*, or *false*, is a given theory.

Bayley(1992) stated, at the end of the 20th century, that insufficient cross-national comparative research was one of the major weaknesses of police science. This is still very much the case, but there has been some progress in testing US based strategies such as hotspot policing in other jurisdictions. Police science and research needs cross-national evidence because most existing theories and models have not yet been sufficiently tested outside the countries in which they were initially developed. We would suggest that the future of police science and research will be increasingly linked to cross-national research and to the ability to demonstrate that a theory or model is valid regardless of contextual variables – namely, but not exclusively, national legal frameworks and law enforcement systems and organizations.

Scientific knowledge on which police and policing models *matter* and *work* only when specific variables or sets of variables are present and active, is crucial for European police and policing. Possible future European-shared police and policing models will be able to be built from ‘what *matters* and *works*’ irrespective of specific national variables or sets of variables – and the ‘what doesn’t’ will be able to be categorized, by police practitioners, not as useless or ‘junk’ theories or models, as they usually still are, but as ones that, although not entirely *false*, simply will never work in some countries.

Cross-national research evidence will help European policy-makers and police practitioners to decide on what models or parts of models can be implemented instead of instinctively rejecting theories or models that *seem not to work* everywhere. The European Police Science and Research Bulletin will keep trying to contribute, through its current editors and in the scope of the Bulletin’s modest capacities and possibilities, for the dissemination of cross-national research findings. The Bulletin’s new permanent board of scientific reviewers, whose names are identified in this issue, will certainly be an asset and added value for future contributors – namely by suggesting on how to improve the reliability and validity of the submitted research designs and findings.





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