
Chapter II: Comparative approaches — introduction

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The comparative approach as a distinctive way of analysing and explaining social and political developments is an important instrument for police research of researching the police and policing, in particular in the relationship between police forces and other institutions charged with police tasks on the one side and society and politics on the other side. In times of increasing Europeanisation, the internationalisation and globalisation of police tasks, subjects, networks and instruments, systematic and scientific comparison is an essential tool for generating knowledge and developing best practice models and strengthening cooperation.

The authors of the following three contributions in this chapter use different research designs in comparing different police systems and policing processes and instruments in Europe (and beyond). They show variations in the application of the comparative approach according to their perspectives and interests.

Sebastian Roché's bold and ambitious essay picks up from a central point of discussion argued in the first chapter: what is the police, and what is or what shall police science be? Starting with a historical review of the conceptual development of the key terms, and in critical reference to the 'major thinking tide' of the 'evidence-based' approach, Roché aims to progress our understanding of police (and police science in particular), by applying a strictly comparative, taxonomic perspective to the object of interest: police. By discarding attempts to discover the essential meaning of 'police' by start of definition, he instead favours approximation

through systematic comparison of the multifaceted manifestations of police organisations. Consistent with his methodological taxonomic approach, 'police forms', 'morphologies' and 'ecosystems' are introduced as central methodological notions. 'Polity', 'doctrines' and 'accountabilities' are further chief analytical tools, rather rooted in political than life sciences. In the subsequent, largely empirical part of the contribution, the author strives to demonstrate the potential merits of his approach by applying his proposed methodology to a sample of six countries of diverse size and stark variations in the configuration of their innate police forms (France, India, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States). The reader is taken along an extended exercise of categorisation, comparison and analysis, resulting in some noteworthy insights and discoveries — a possibly blatant, but often neglected one is that, seen from a European, international or even global level, there is such an astonishing variety and diversity of existing 'police forms', that for having a serious debate about 'the police', may be every discussion should start from second thoughts. Taking a consequent comparative-phenomenological position and looking at police forces as 'organised life forms' is certainly a fresh, non-orthodox path towards an advanced understanding of police forces and their actions. Of course a lot of questions are raised in the course of the argument, and Roché is the first to admit from the outset that his is a long way. Nevertheless, this is certainly a distinct approach in police science and noteworthy not least as a complementary building block of theory in the face of more traditional essentialist contributions.

Cyrille Fijnaut exemplifies the comparative approach by placing it within a historical context. He describes the background, analyses the situation and explains the relevance of a comparative approach in police research for policing in Europe as such and in particular for police cooperation. He shows that the history of police/policing in different countries in Europe had a strong impact on the development of police/policing in other countries or parts of Europe. Although in all European countries many reforms of the police system and organisation took place during the last two centuries you can still find police models in several European countries with roots in past history (e.g. the model of the French Gendarmerie). He states that ‘... in a European context, policing has never been just a national issue, because it always had been influenced highly by developments in other states.’ He reveals that these developments had a major influence on cross-border policing, cross-border cooperation and the harmonisation of policing in Europe. In the second part he deals with some aspects of the ongoing development in cross-border cooperation. In particular, he attaches great importance to the influential role of conventions. He describes the development of cooperation in specific areas of policing (e.g. cooperation of traffic police — TISPOL) and special police operation forces — ATLAS) and in a European region (Euroregio Maas-Rhine). In the third part he presents a brief future perspective on the Lisbon Treaty (signed by the EU Member States on 13 December 2007, and entered into force on 1 December 2009) and on the report of the ‘*High Level Advisory Group on the Future of EU Home affairs policies*’ (17 January 2008) and their impact in the field of police cooperation. In the final part of his paper he gives

an analysis of the current situation of comparative research in Europe — with different obstacles — and he proposes some ways to facilitate it.

The third paper in this chapter by **Gabriele Jacobs, Kate Horton** and **P. Saskia Bayerl** presents the central ideas, the used methods, the project structure and the outcomes of a long-term and complex comparative research project. COMPOSITE (Comparative Police Studies in the EU) unites researchers and practitioners from 10 European countries and 15 institutions to research complex issues regarding organisational changes in police. The research is carried out by a team of researchers belonging to different cultural areas and different disciplines operating as an international network. The added value of this network-method for police science is an achievement of a better understanding of cross-national phenomena in the field of police and policing. It can help to learn from each other with a view to convergence, common concepts and harmonisation (e.g. of training, police strategies methods, communication, equipment). The COMPOSITE project can be seen as a serious effort to overcome the situation described by Fijnaut in the first paper of this chapter where he deplores: ‘there is no coherent, consistent, long-term building of a body of knowledge about what is going on in the field of policing in Europe and particularly related to cross-border police cooperation.’

Together all three papers demonstrate the distinct theoretical relevance and practical value of comparative research for the development of police and policing in Europe and particularly of police cooperation in Europe and beyond.