

# Doing European police research — an exciting expedition called COMPOSITE

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## The disconnect between science and policing

Commentators draw attention to ‘a fundamental disconnect between science and policing’ (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011). Echoing the comments of McDonald (1987), Bradley and Nixon (2009) highlight a prevalent miscommunication between police and researchers, which sees police distrustful and cynical about the contributions of researchers, and scientists frustrated and incredulous at the police’s resistance to scientific expertise and insights. It seems that (in the eyes of police practitioners) scientists are not able to provide useful contributions to the pressing (management) questions of police practitioners, while (in the eyes of scientists) police practitioners are neither willing nor able to appreciate and use the academic insights of scholars, which aim at more efficient and professional police management.

Obviously, scholars and practitioners could learn a lot from each other. As we are scholars at a business school, we are reluctant to comment on what we feel practitioners should do to overcome what McDonald (1987; cited in Bradley, 2005) called the ‘dialogue of the deaf’. Nevertheless, we are passionate about engaging in this dialogue.

In an attempt to contribute to the conversation between science and policing, we present the EU project COMPOSITE (Comparative police studies in the EU), which we are coordinating at the Rotterdam

School of Management, Erasmus University, The Netherlands. In a second contribution in this volume (Bayerl, Jacobs and Horton) we describe an example of an empirical study done by COMPOSITE together with CEPOL on the use of social media in European polices. In the current chapter, our aim is not to discuss results, but rather, to take the opportunity to reflect on the main driver behind the project (contributing to reconnecting police, management and science), on the methodological set-up (cross-cultural and interdisciplinary) and on the challenges we have encountered so far on our research journey. We end with stressing that this demanding investment into the cross-cultural, science-practitioner, interdisciplinary dialogue is a tremendously rewarding endeavour and certainly worth the effort for all parties involved.

The link between police and research is the primary domain of the field of police science, which is mainly located at police schools and police universities. Police research explicitly pursues the ‘scientific study of the police as an institution and of policing as a process’ (Del Barrio Romero, Björger and Jaschke, 2009). Yet critics of this field suggest that there are a number of important gaps in police science research, which detract from its contribution to the domain. Marenin (2005) rues a general tendency to disregard the influence of the cultural and social context of policing. In addition, he criticises a reliance on short-term evaluative studies, which are to the detriment of long-term, theoretically driven research agendas. Finally he pinpoints a dearth

of systematic and integrative empirical studies aimed at better understanding policing processes on an international level. The source of such criticism largely stems from the narrow focus of police science research, which tends to adopt an exclusively Anglo-Saxon and mono-disciplinary focus (van Maanen, 2002; Manning, 2005). Yet police issues increasingly transcend cultural and geographical divides, calling for an integrative response that incorporates diverse perspectives, representing different cultural, linguistic and disciplinary traditions.

This contribution is developed in the context of the CEPOL Police Research and Science Conference in Lyon in September 2012. We experienced this conference as — compared to the academic conferences in which we normally participate — unusually inclusive and interactive. It was inspiring and encouraging being in the middle of a highly diverse group that was united by its commitment to policing. Not being police researchers ourselves, we were impressed to learn more about the vibrant field of police research, which witnesses new and promising developments. Among others, Professor Monica den Boer from the Dutch Police Academy and Professor Nick Fyfe from the Scottish Institute for Policing Research described that the police are themselves increasingly open to research activities, more frequently favouring evidence-based management. Police research can be of particular benefit in developing and advancing organisational processes and practices, mapping and anticipating social, economic and technological trends and contributing to police education in the form of curricular developments and executive education, published materials and accreditation schemes. Innovative scholarship and interdisciplinary approaches are on the rise in police research, combined with a more active participation of universities in the field of policing.

### **Has academic (business) research become irrelevant?**

At business schools, academic voices have become increasingly uneasy with the growing divide between rigour in methodology and relevance for practice (Gulati, 2007), which sees the pursuit of research excellence as largely disconnected from the desire to engage practitioners and applied audiences in relevant dialogues. Business schools — which should be at the frontline of practitioner-relevant research — have been

in a self-diagnosed identity and legitimation crisis for more than a decade now (Mingers & Willmott, 2012). While business schools have long been under attack for their low academic research standards, they seem now to have overly invested in their relatively newly gained academic ambitions. Business scholars warn that by the exclusive focus on academic excellence, business schools run the risk of 'institutionalising their own irrelevance' (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). MBA programmes are dramatically losing their attractiveness to the market and there is very little evidence that current, academic, top-of-the-scale research at business schools is in any way influential on management practice (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Obviously scholars need to be in the field, in close contact with practitioners to identify relevant research questions and to tailor scientific outputs to the messy management reality of organisations. Still scholars also should stick to their highly developed scientific tools and take a clear stance in terms of independent and innovative research agendas. Only when both aspects are well balanced, can scholars seriously contribute to the improvement of management and organisations. This is exactly the passion we felt, when building the EU project COMPOSITE: combining scientific rigour with practical relevance.

### **COMPOSITE — Comparative Police Studies in the EU**

Within this context, COMPOSITE aims to enrich existing approaches to European policing by offering an integrative response to the study of police organisational change. In particular, COMPOSITE responds to calls for a more rigorous and comprehensive research platform, by offering a long-term (4 years), multi-disciplinary, European-wide research project. In so doing, COMPOSITE unites researchers and practitioners from 10 European countries and 15 institutions to research complex issues regarding organisational change. The project includes psychologists, sociologists, economists and engineers, academics, consultants and technicians, police scientists and police officers of every rank and position. A unique characteristic of COMPOSITE is the ongoing dialogue between police and science representatives that is built into the project's structure, including the direct involvement of police officers in

strategic advisory and end-user boards. These boards meet with the scholars of COMPOSITE at least twice per year and provide direct feedback on the research questions, methodology and findings.

The focus of COMPOSITE is on organisational change within European police organisations. The impact of societal change is increasingly felt across Europe as globalisation, internal (legal) integration and the financial downturn fundamentally alter the landscape of policing across the continent.

COMPOSITE is divided into three constituents (labelled actionlines), which each offer a different perspective on the topic of change. The first actionline, which was completed in August 2012, takes a macro perspective, providing an extensive comparative analysis of police forces in the 10 COMPOSITE countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M), Netherlands, Romania and United Kingdom). This constituent combines an analysis of external context features with an investigation of internal climate and resources, in each of the 10 countries. In addition it incorporates a focus on two key topics, namely knowledge sharing and technology. The second actionline takes a micro perspective and provides a closer analysis of three focal topics; namely change dynamics, leadership and identity, which are expected to be critical to the execution and planning of organisational change processes. Initial insights from actionline 1 also inform a second and more focused investigation of police-related technologies in actionline 2. Finally the third actionline turns attention to the practical and tangible outcomes of COMPOSITE in terms of the dissemination of project findings, the development of a managerial toolbox (containing training and consultancy materials and best practices) and an annual police monitor to track trends in European policing. The project collected a broad database in all ten countries; in total we conducted more than 700 qualitative interviews on the external threats and challenges and internal strength and weaknesses of police organisations, technology trends and knowledge sharing in the first part of the project. Additionally case studies were conducted on best policing practices and (international) knowledge sharing and surveys were run in all countries on knowledge-sharing practices. In the second phase of the project another 400 in-depth qualitative interviews on organisational change, technology acceptance,

identity and change leadership were conducted. Next all country teams will run tailored studies on change topics in their specific policing context and a joined survey with police, public and media representatives will be conducted in all ten countries.

Dissemination efforts are equally diverse, ranging from peer-rated academic journals and conferences (e.g. Van den Born et al. forthcoming; Jacobs et al., forthcoming; Deneff, Bayerl & Kaptein, 2013) to policy briefings, expert seminars and practitioner-orientated publications (e.g. Vallet & van den Oord, 2012; Gruschinske, Hirschmann, & Stein-Müller, 2012; Rus, Vonaş, & Băban, 2011). Among others we also provided a project overview and first results in the CEPOL bulletin (Jacobs & Christe-Zeyse, 2012; Deneff, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2012).

In addition to formal and tangible benefits, COMPOSITE provides a platform for more informal connections and dialogue amongst diverse groups. Interestingly, findings from COMPOSITE's research on knowledge sharing indicate that such face-to-face communication is critical to developing relationships and sharing insights amongst police officers. Similarly, research testifies to the importance of informal and proximal means of communications in minimising the miscommunications that are a hallmark of cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary research.

This exchange is important in order to gauge the relevance of research topics and to ensure that the research is relevant and legitimate for internal police audiences. In research terms, this ongoing exchange between practitioners and academics is critical for external validity and for the applicability of project findings.

In the next two paragraphs we elaborate on the methodological background of COMPOSITE and the practical experiences we have gained on this European-wide project.

## Linking the insider and outsider view in cross-cultural research

COMPOSITE has an explicit cross-cultural set-up. A culture-dimensional approach has been proven to be too short-handed to deal with the many specific subtleties in cross-cultural management. The knowledge about cultural differences drawn from the research of Hofstede (1980) reflects only a first heuristic to capture cultural differences. These cultural dimensions were developed to increase cultural understanding, and to allow for cross-cultural comparison. Yet, using this research to understand concrete behaviours shows its limitations. In the context of COMPOSITE, therefore, we argue that the development of theory and the collection of data in the cross-cultural management domain require a broader selection of methods than are used at the moment in the extant literature. Cultural phenomena, as social phenomena in general, cannot be described sufficiently by simple dimensional characteristics. An extended model which incorporates — next to general cultural values — also situational and contextual information, such as the history of a specific police sector, provides a more complex way of understanding culture.

This resonates well with the so-called societal effect research tradition in European sociology (see, e.g. Sorge, 2005). In this tradition, the key message is that cross-country work requires much more than a simple comparison of rather aggregate national culture attributes. How things work out in a specific country context is driven by much more than 'aggregate' national culture alone. Other important aspects, for instance, are historical path dependencies rooted in institutional arrangements (North, 1990) and the subtle impact of language on attitudes and behaviour (Akkermans, Harzing and van Witteloostuijn, 2010). The bottom line is that the devil is in the detail of implementation. For instance, notwithstanding claims of universality, the actual implementation of, say, 'evidence-based policing' in the British police force will be very different from that in the French police.

The sociological argument is reflected in the psychological literature. Social psychology shows that there can be large gaps between expressed attitudes — such as cultural value statements — and

actual behaviours. Situational factors are often likely to overrule cultural norms. Personal experience of past interactions with a specific person, the specific demand characteristics of a social setting or personal characteristics of the individuals involved can exert strong influence on behaviour. As argued by Ajzen (1991), behaviours are predicted best by attitudes that specifically relate to those behaviours rather than to more global or general attitudes. Also, the (perceived) demand characteristics of a situation, a person's self-efficacy or specific outcome-expectations can influence their behaviour. All this has clear implications for the methodology of cross-cultural research. Our other contribution within this volume shows that the use of technology is an interesting application of a cross-cultural perspective. In this case, specific factors in different national police forces strongly influence the acceptance and use of social media by police forces.

The methodology of current cross-cultural research can be best described as the contrast between an insider's (emic) and an outsider's (etic) perspective (Pike, 1971). Cross-cultural management research needs to incorporate qualitative methods in a more consequent manner to solve the methodological problem of quantitative measurement equivalence (Van de Vijver and Poortinga, 1997; Van de Vijver and Leung, 1997; Berry, 1989). Only then, can the explanation of concrete behaviour be enhanced. This is precisely what we incorporated in our research design of COMPOSITE: to reconcile emic and etic methodologies such that we can take account of the subtle mechanisms described above.

Pike (1971) illustrates the difference between the emic and the etic perspective with the following example. A car would be described from an emic perspective as a whole, a *gestalt*. All elements would be described in their relationship with each other: from an etic perspective all elements would be described organised into categories as in a warehouse. In social interaction we can observe etically completely different forms for the same emic meaning — a 'no' can be expressed by a word or by shaking the head. Vice versa etically identical utterances can have emically different meanings — a serious and an ironic remark are etically identical, the emic meaning can only be concluded from the context. Similarly, from an etic point of view,

a researcher can look at categories such as 'loyalty', 'professionalism', 'integrity' or 'authority' by asking the target group to answer questions pertaining to certain operationalised items that attempt to measure the prevalence of these categories. From an emic point of view it is crucial to first understand the culture-specific meaning of these concepts. An officer who is considered a loyal officer in country A would behave rather differently from a loyal officer in country B, because the understanding of loyalty in country A can include a different set of behaviours than in country B. As we see from our interviews, loyalty is shown in one country by proactive, critical behaviour, while in other countries loyalty is shown by following orders without asking questions. Professional identity is in one country mainly based on an urge to serve the public, in another country professional identity is first of all inspired by the duty of protecting the state. Therefore, when talking about a truly blue, highly professional police officer, some might have an impartial, weapon wearing, hands-on crime-fighter in mind, while others think about a tolerant, highly communicative, cooperative citizen-helper. Without knowing these context-specific differences, standardised measurements of loyalty or police professionalism cannot be developed.

In COMPOSITE we look for both, universalities and for the cultural variability of behaviour. We aim to know

the degree of loyalty and professional identification that police officers have across Europe, but we also like to learn how loyal behaviour varies across countries and how the contents of professional identity differ across contexts. Therefore we emphasise data breadth and comparability, but also in-depth analysis of each specific cultural context. Hence, we adopt quantitative etic and qualitative emic methods within COMPOSITE. To develop such an encompassing set of research instruments, researchers from all ten different countries start with emic research in their specific context. We do this by jointly developed interview guidelines. In the following steps, we identify where comparisons are possible and where not, to subsequently develop a mixture of research instruments with both universal components for all countries and country-specific components for each separate country in the study. Categories that we have to explore in an emic way (such as leadership, professional identity or change success) are identified in the research process. The questions around these categories determine the aspects that are taken for granted in the respective context, which includes a certain type of behaviour as well as certain assumptions, thinking patterns or value judgements. Only after these contextual differences are sorted out and described in detail, does a comparison become meaningful (derived etic). Figure 8 visualises an emic-etic research process like this.

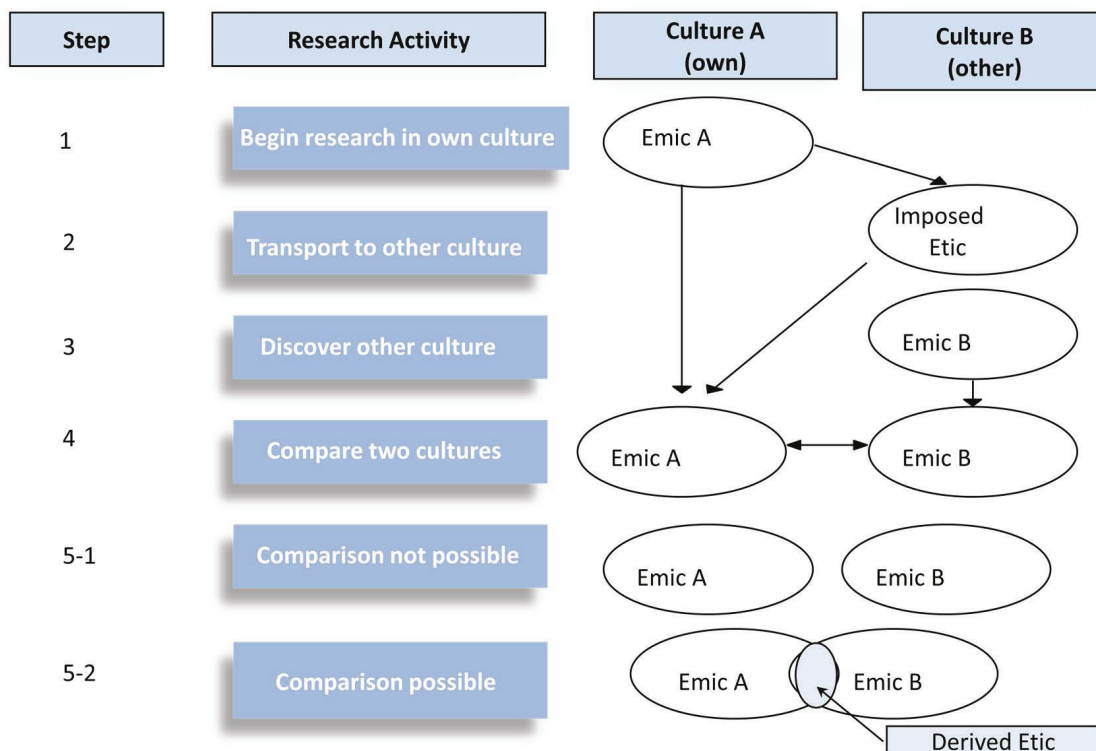


Figure 1: Emic, etic and derived etic (Berry, 1989)

## The research reality in the European laboratory: What to expect if you interconnect

### Translations, sampling and other issues that keep a researcher's life interesting

Of course this complex endeavour is not always destined to run smoothly. The complexity of the research design is greatly increased when working in an international, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic environment. Even larger problems arise when differences in sociocultural or psychographic variables imply different attitudes and behaviours when using particular products, such as video surveillance technology or intelligence data systems. The translation equivalence is an issue in nearly all contexts (what is a 'stakeholder' in German? How do we translate 'police intelligence' in Macedonian?). Additionally, sample selection equivalence proved to be a serious challenge. Police forces are historically built differently in European countries, the degree of centralisation differs widely, and the embedding in the legal and democratic system is realised in many different ways. Next to this, the data collection equivalence was a topic, and will certainly remain a topic, in all of our research meetings. The cooperation readiness of respondents is different from country to country, influenced by many factors. In one country, it is perfectly appropriate to approach police officers for cooperation at the district level; in other countries, first the ministry needs to officially agree. In some countries, we received open and highly self-critical responses at all hierarchical levels, with standing invitations to join police forces in their daily duties; in other countries, respondents considered our requests for interviews as a possible threat to their professional career — not a surprising reaction given that the interviews were conducted while the television in one corner of the office showed messages stating that 7 000 police officers will be made redundant in the coming years.

### Beyond the comfort zone

Apart from discussions within the COMPOSITE research team, we have benefited from feedback from local police partners, as well as the international end-user board. Our end-user board, composed of representatives from all participating police forces, has proved to be an important asset in overcoming the above research challenges. These end users can facilitate access to forces,

offer open feedback and provide insider knowledge on the accessibility, interpretation and presentation of data. Moreover, end users have functioned as an important reality check of our first ideas, and helped us to focus and select research questions. Interestingly enough, the first media responses served a similar function, since we realised that certain topics were picked up with more interest than others. As can be seen from our dissemination activities ([www.composite-project.eu](http://www.composite-project.eu)), especially the topic of the use of social media in the European arena has received wide media attention, which encouraged us to further focus on this issue in the form of specialised workshops.

We need to be honest: working in the highly diverse setting of COMPOSITE means for most of us, most of the time that we act outside of our comfort zones. Scholars joining night-police patrols for the first time in their life, travelling hundreds of kilometres at the Romanian border to conduct interviews, attending bruise-intensive martial arts training with the Czech police. Police officers facing heated debates about seemingly minor methodological questions, being introduced to the strict co-author guidelines of academic journals and intellectual property rights of surveys, or needing to comment on hundreds of pages of scientific text and translating deadly boring abstract interview questions into plain police language. All in all, COMPOSITE has triggered steep learning curves in many unexpected and sometimes unintended respects. COMPOSITE is a thrilling experience, it triggers many theoretical insights and opens the eyes to our own blind spots and exciting new research agendas.

### Logistics...

Not only is the research design highly complex in a multifaceted project such as COMPOSITE, but so is the daily research procedure. Working in a multi-national and multi-disciplinary group brings all the challenges of diverse teams to the table. Language problems, time-intensive and cost-expensive travel, unexpectedly cancelled flights and full agendas belong to the practical side of this reality. Talking about the academic side, different disciplinary perspectives on research designs and topics, and different approaches to methodologies and analyses are just some of the issues that enriched and challenged our first research year. In practice, this implies the need for an ongoing investment in knowledge sharing, as well as the regular discussion

of a wide variety of empirical, practical and theoretical issues, both in a series of face-to-face meetings and through the use of virtual facilities.

Nevertheless, for good reasons, international research collaboration is widely advocated as a way of conducting research in the social sciences, generally, and in the area of international business, particularly. Local data and contextual knowledge can best be accessed by collaboration with colleagues in the respective countries. Research teams that can tap into native insights can best guarantee a culturally and contextually sensitive analysis. The inclusion of researchers from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds facilitates that a wider variety of different facets of the research domain are considered (Kumar, 2000). Still, the different institutional backgrounds and the varying research views have an influence on teamwork. Different research paradigms and cognitive referential systems (disciplinary and culturally, and practitioner or science -orientated) can enhance the quality of the jointly developed research solutions, as long as paradigms are openly discussed (Sauquoit and Jacobs, 1998; Trait, USAir, & Ravagnani, 1998).

All in all, assembling a group of researchers having different theoretical backgrounds, academic fields, proximity to the field of policing and cultural origins or nationalities is a complex matrix. We followed earlier insights from research on diverse academic teams (Sauquet and Jacobs, 1998) that developing a research instrument that produces data useful to the different theoretical frameworks is a better procedure than coming to terms with complex issues such as whether paradigms are compatible or not. With this in mind, we developed interview guidelines that covered different theoretical interests, and we focused our research meetings on the discussion of the comparability of data, and the identification of communalities and differences.

### **And still ... why crossing boundaries is worth the effort**

We commented at the beginning on why we feel that we as scholars should engage in a practitioner-scientist debate and were reluctant to give advice to police practitioners. Here at the end of our contribution, we would like to mention nevertheless some observations from us as business scholars about police management.

We study police as one case of organisational behaviour and organisational change and we are able to conclude many general insights about organisations as such from our research. In a recent side study we compared the professional identity of police officers with market researchers and could identify many shared dimensions. Police organisations are organisations, the police profession is a profession, police tasks are tasks and police change is change. Obviously we do not recommend repeating the mistakes of the past where private-sector management solutions were blindly imposed on police organisations. Instead, we advocate a highly context-specific analysis of police managerial implications — with the theoretical machinery and methodological tools developed in general management research. We would like to invite police management professionals to show more interest in the rich management literature developed by scholars worldwide. Police professionals rightly feel that business scholars should show more interest in non-profit organisations and police-specific conditions. Yet, scholars only do this when the police also actively voice their needs and interests. Police research is not a core topic of business schools and universities, but there are examples of highly recognised international scholars in the 'hard core' academic arena who study policing. The Academy of Management, which is the leading professional organisation for management scholars, has published 354 articles in their journals based on or referring to police organisations. Journals like *Harvard Business Review*, *California Management Review*, *Sloan Management Review*, *Organizational Dynamics* or *Long-range Planning* or the practitioner-orientated journals of the world leading Academy of Management such as *Academy of Management Perspectives* and *Academy of Management Learning and Education* are actually great value for money and also worth looking at for police practitioners. Stronger active interest from the police might also help police-interested management scholars at business schools and universities to legitimate their research activities within their own communities.

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