
Chapter IV: Practical Police Problems and Applied Research — Introduction

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It could pass as general wisdom that the more scientific research is geared towards issues considered as 'real' problems by police officers, the more likely the outcomes of such projects are regarded as 'useful' and accepted among police practitioners. This is the general advantage 'applied research' often has over more reflective, strategic varieties, let alone critical approaches. While this assessment might be taken for granted, it is not necessarily self-evident what exactly a real, practical police problem constitutes, and from which angle it is perceived and defined. A simple starting point would be to declare a police problem those areas of unlawful behaviour, where the police are called upon to intervene, investigate or prevent. The challenge then is that there are many situations, and they change their form and characteristics depending on the position and viewpoint of the observer or stakeholder. In this chapter we have collected contributions that can be easily classified as dealing with research applied to real, practical police problems. The levels of 'practicality' and the approaches to analysing and tackling the underlying problems vary significantly however. The papers in this chapter mostly exemplify the multiplicity of 'police problems' and how differently research can be applied in search of solutions.

To begin, the paper by Stol, Gundhus, Runhovde and Rønning deals with an issue which *prima facie* seems to be a rather mundane police problem: police patrol work. Based on proper empirical observational studies of what police officers in diverse places actually do, when they do patrol work, their approach attempts to capture the broader picture, by also looking at the

context of the well-known daily routine: trying to grasp why patrol work is done in the way it is done. While they mainly present empirical findings for Norway, as one of the five European countries that were part of a wider comparative project, they give an excellent example how proper reflection on key terms and methods used pays off in getting useful practical results, as well as revealing conceptual insights. What appears to be a rather sober empirical stock-taking exercise, led by a dominant managerial perspective of how best to allocate resources, leads to a helpful conceptual model of police patrol work and is convincingly connected to the more fundamental issue on how modern policing concepts are in line with citizens' expectations.

The next two papers, both initially presented in 2006 but nevertheless very much up-to-date in terms of the principle challenges at stake, will take the reader from the day-to-day beat police business on the streets to the more volatile and sometimes tumultuous scenery of public-order policing.

Based on her extended scholarship and publication on urban problems, French professor Sophie Body-Gendrot offers a captivating analytical narrative about the riots that occurred in French cities in 2005. Interestingly, she is following a similar framework of enquiry, which was famously first deployed by the 1967 United States presidential National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder: What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen? What (can be) was done? Carefully presenting and reviewing the actions on the parts of rioters as well as police, she makes the point that there was something

quite specifically 'French' about the events and rejects their simple categorisation as 'riots' as well as simplistic one-cause explanations, pointing out the specific circumstances and conditions where they took place.

The notion of 'riots' in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is chiefly associated with the urban, the big cities, perhaps not only in the mind of the public and the media. Rob I. Mawby clearly challenges this notion of public disorders as a police problem solely belonging to the fabric of the urban centres in his contribution. Instead he directs our attention to public order problems for the police in leisure and holiday areas, where anti-social behaviour and crime is often fuelled by alcohol and drug consumption: 'Research suggests that many tourist' areas experience relatively high levels of crime and disorder (...)' He illustrates his argument with four case studies: street disturbances between 'mods' and 'rockers' in Brighton, school leavers holidaying in an Australian coastal resort, Amsterdam's red light district, and Faliraki, a holiday destination for young Brits in Greece. While concerned about the appropriate — and effective — style of policing, Mawby highlights available policy options to deal with the 'police problem' and emphasises the chances of 'community involvement and multi-agency partnerships'. In his view, it would be unfair to focus criticism on the police, for what should not be framed exclusively as a police problem.

The authors of the first three papers in this chapter have shed an analytical light on a specific police — or policing — problems from an external observational point by applying a variety of disciplinary research methodologies. 'External' here means looking at 'the problem' detached from the pressures and limitations of direct operational engagement. Nevertheless their observations are engaged with the issue at hand and, in conclusion, critical but constructive and advice offered, if wanted.

The perspective locus of Long, Alison and McManus's approach is different: they look at research as a means of operational support to find more effective ways to identify and investigate child pornography offenders. They ask 'perhaps the simplest question the police currently face (...) whether an indecent image offender is committing, or is likely to commit contact sexual abuse against a child?'. In an effort clearly based on an evidence-led approach, they scan the criminological landscape for

what research has to offer as knowledge, which might be useful to guide investigations and operational tactics. Being aware that the nature of this offence instantly crosses national and juridical boundaries, they highlight the potential significance of culture and adequate understanding of the diversity of these cultures in regard to this type of crime. Interestingly, behind the 'outbound' police problem of tackling child pornography another, 'inbound' one surfaces: the need to focus scarce — and obviously insufficient — resources on the most harmful cases and offenders. Efficiency is certainly a reoccurring issue in many other practical police problem areas — and applied research is the vehicle that is called in as a prospective solution to this police problem of organisational nature.

Applied research has significant potential to solve or at least limit practical 'police problems' and will, over time, yield a more evidence- and science-based style of and approach to policing. But can new research and science-based policing methods create their own practical problems — calling for new research to grasp what it happening? That conclusion could be provocatively drawn from the presentation of a French-German comparative research project, which is in its early stages, but still highlights another version of how research is applied to policing problems. In their paper, respective project heads Thierry Delpuech and Thomas Scheffer present a detailed outline of their research project. CODISP (*Création de Concepts et d'Outils pour le Développement de l'Intelligence de Sécurité Publique*) is introduced as a cultural and social science project on recent forms of knowledge management work in law enforcement organisations. The aim is to analyse the way knowledge management in law enforcement (its methods and forms, as well as the means and degree of knowledge sharing), and knowledge-based law enforcement work (in regard to social environments and types of tort), interact. The project traces and tries to understand the specific workflows occurring in the everyday work of law enforcement staff. The project specifically looks into the question of what role innovative concepts (such as 'intelligence-led policing') play in police work. The outcomes of this research will be translated into training material and, based on this, is considered useful for solving or preventing (new) police problems.

As mentioned before; this chapter opens just a small window onto the wide and varied landscape of the deliverables of scientific research and academic perspectives, which can be useful and supportive for the improved handling of police problems. In ideal case this will be scientific truths delivered for the practitioner's consumption — sometimes inconvenient and occasionally to be taken with a pinch of salt.