

*RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT***ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE IN EUROPEAN
POLICING: PROJECT COMPOSITE**

By

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We provide an overview of the EU-funded project COMPOSITE (Comparative Police Studies in the EU). COMPOSITE (www.composite-project.eu) started in August 2010 and will run until August 2014. Fifteen partners across ten European countries study in this period organisational change in European police forces. In this report we present next to the framework and the main components of COMPOSITE results of the first year of research.

Organisational change as a common challenge for European police forces

Security issues consistently rank among the most pressing concerns of citizens in virtually all European countries. Terrorism, organized crime, drugs, and violence have an impact upon citizens' perception of their immediate surroundings and also shape their attitudes towards the state and its representatives. As favourable as most Europeans view the unification of Europe over the past decades, there is still some skepticism remaining with respect to the (perceived) downside of some of these developments. Open borders, the free flow of people, goods, information, and capital also facilitate the planning and committing of crimes. Politicians and police forces alike are faced with the pressure to address these problems in ways that should alleviate citizens fears on the one hand, but will not infringe upon civil liberties and human rights on the other hand. These challenges require modern police forces that efficiently co-operate with forces in other countries, and are capable to react flexibly and effectively.

Major societal changes such as the impact of the global economy and far reaching technological developments led to ambitious change programmes aiming at modernizing and rationalizing the way police work is conducted in most European countries. In the con-

text of the EU it is relevant to understand the impact of the specific cultural and social contexts of policing and it is vital to consider the sometimes dramatic differences in which current challenges on the one hand and modern policing concepts and instruments on the other hand are interpreted and implemented in the different member states of the EU. Examples of these changes are:

COMPOSITE conducts systematic comparative research on the manner police forces in different European member states are managing these challenges within their specific social and cultural context. Especially in the domain of security and policing such comparative research holding a focus on the social and cultural context is of high relevance for the field of *technology and engineering*. Benefiting from the adoption of technological innovations usually also requires simultaneous change in the social context and organisational structure. Large sums are currently spent on the development and adoption of new technology that could potentially leverage the productivity and overall performance of police forces and other security agencies, but the eventual results of these projects are mixed, and not seldom face resistance in both the police forces and the public. The ultimate effect of the new security technologies currently under development in FP-projects could be increased substantially if their implementation could be supported by a sophisticated theory of overall organisational change in security providing organizations, social and cultural differences between EU-member states.

One important issue in this respect which has also been confirmed by previous research is that large scale change processes in police forces run the risk of being considered as threats to the *organisational identity* and are therefore often resisted by police officers (see e.g. Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, Keegan & Pólós, 2008). In organizations such as the police this may lead to a critical decrease in commitment, loyalty, and effectiveness. The majority of European research programmes in police related areas tend to focus on technical aspects of security issues and thereby tend to neglect such social and cultural dynamics. In COMPOSITE we aim at integrating technical and social aspects.

COMPOSITE brings together a selection of researchers with a broad variety of disciplinary backgrounds (sociology, psychology, economics, engineering, political sciences, business and management studies, police sciences, organisational behaviour) in order to study the underlying social and cultural complexity of the management of European policing in times of rather dramatic changes. It also provides an international network of leading European universities, police academies and police research institutes from different European countries which offers the opportunity of cross-fertilization among research schools in a truly multidisciplinary approach and the opportunity to get a direct

impact from practitioners on the relevant research agendas. To guarantee a constant check of practical relevance of the scientific development within the project, we have established an end-user board and an advisory board. Both boards consist of high ranking international police representatives who do not only reflect on a regular basis on the ongoing research process and results of the project, but also support field access and the dissemination and implementation of results.

The goal of COMPOSITE is not restricted to the extension of scientific knowledge and theory building, but also aims at providing valuable insights into the factors that restrict or facilitate change in an organisation that has a major impact upon the perception of good governance in all European societies. A better understanding of risks and opportunities of change processes in the police will contribute to a higher level of acceptance of state institutions among relevant audiences. Extended knowledge of change processes in European police forces as well as the knowledge of the inner workings of these change processes will also improve cooperation, information exchange, and knowledge sharing from one police force to another.

The overall objectives of COMPOSITE

“To contribute to more efficient and effective policing in the EU, by outlining roadmaps for police forces in each country that lead to enhancement of both individu-

al police force capability and performance and joint European operations.”

Major societal changes led to ambitious change programmes aiming at modernizing and rationalizing the way police work is conducted in most European countries. The project aims to improve both the planning, and the execution of change initiatives in the police sector, aligning them better with their cultural and societal context and minimizing the predominantly negative process-effects, to make sure the European police forces can perform to their best ability during change processes, and improve their individual and joint capabilities, as well as their public image, as results of the change processes.

The project delivers:

1. Extensive comparative strategic analysis of environmental policing opportunities and threats to police organizations in 10 European countries and of the internal capabilities, trends and best practices to meet current and future challenges.
2. A comparative analysis of planning and execution of the change processes, focusing on the impact of leadership, professional and organisational identities and societal expectations.
3. A managerial toolbox containing instruments such as training, consultancy, advice on technological adaptation and the ‘Annual European Police Force Monitor’ to plan and execute changes responding to known and yet unknown challenges and opportunities.

Brief reflection on the research reality in the European laboratory

The complexity of a 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 was an issue in nearly all contexts (What is a “stakeholder” in German?; How do we translate “Police intelligence” into Macedonian?; et cetera). 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.

Apart from discussions within the COMPOSITE research team, we could benefit 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, proved to be an important asset in overcoming the above research challenges. These end users could facilitate difficult access, they gave open feedback, and they provided insider knowledge on the accessibility, interpretation and presentation of data. Moreover, end users functioned in this first year as an important reality-check of our first ideas, and helped 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 in our first deliverable on technology than others. Especially the topic of the use of social media in the European arena received wide media attention, which encouraged us to further focus on this issue in form of specialised workshops (see Deneff, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2011).

Main results of the first year of research

The main focus of the first year lay on the understanding of the context of the police forces that are part of COMPOSITE and an analysis of the main triggers for change. For this purpose a PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) analysis was conducted through more than 400 interviews with police officers across hierarchical ranks and different types of external stakeholders across the police forces in our set of ten countries. From the PEST-analysis, a number of interesting observations can be derived.

- First, the effect of the economic crisis on the police forces should not be underestimated. Almost all police organisations that were involved in our study have been severely affected by the economic crisis through budget and salary cuts. This is, in a sense, counter-intuitive because economic downturns also seem to lead to more crime, social unrest, et cetera. In other words, in “bad times”, you need more police, not less. From our interview data, a positive relationship emerges between the severity of the economic downturn, on the one hand, and the impact of the economy on the police forces, on the other hand. That is, the police forces in countries hit most severely by economic decline have been and will be confronted with the largest budget and salary cuts.
- Second, albeit posing a few interesting challenges, the technological development is generally seen as very positive from a policing perspective. Especially ICT advancements are viewed as offering positive opportunities to policing, as these may help the police in their ongoing efforts to catch criminals and keep order, and to work more efficiently with less tedious work. German police officers, however, tended to be rather apprehensive with respect to recent developments in ICT-technology, pointing out that these developments also provided new opportunities to criminals and facilitated the emergence of new types of crime. This was mentioned in other countries (e.g., the Netherlands and France), too, but to a lesser extent. German police officers indicated that in Germany politicians and public opinion seem to be reluctant to give police similar rights to use modern surveillance techniques as in the UK or the Netherlands – a quite understandable reluctance given the specific German experience with repressive regimes in the 20th century.

Social developments are, by and large, evaluated to be very negative for policing, generating challenging threats. These social trends do not so much have a short-term impact, but rather generate a strong damaging impact on policing in the long(er) term. These developments are related to changing norms and values, decreasing authority of the police, changing demographic composition of the population, and increasing inequality in socie-

ty¹. Especially the interviewees from large Western European democracies such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom perceive these social developments as major and harmful. In the Republic of Macedonia and Spain, the assessment of these societal trends is much less negative. And in Italy and Romania, the dominant perception is even that social trends offer positive opportunities, rather than negative threats. But whatever the overall assessment, these societal changes are considered to be the greatest long-term challenge for the police.

Governmental authorities and political parties have the ultimate power over the police. In all countries, police officers report an increasing influence of the government. This can be through large and small reorganisations, the setting of police priorities, the appointment of top police officers, launching new responsibilities, introducing performance standards, developing new police procedures, and even by an increasing tendency to micromanage the police. These governmental initiatives are abundant in the ten European countries. Some of these organisational changes are broad in scope, while others are targeting a specific force, department or procedure. As so many of the external trends are of a political nature, and because of the formal power of the government over the police, the

¹ The police officers tend to think of the past as a “golden age”, where everybody was respecting

logical follow-up expectation would be that these political initiatives have a large impact on the police. However, this is far from what was reported by the interviewees. On the contrary, in general these government-induced changes have less of an impact than economic, social and technological trends. In most countries, these government-induced changes are seen as slightly negative for the police, but here there are large differences across our set of ten countries. In the Czech Republic, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, these government-induced changes are assessed as strong negatives. In Belgium, the Netherlands and Romania, though, they are evaluated to be slightly positive. This is perhaps because these changes are perceived to give more responsibility, autonomy and power to the police organisation, and since these changes are not related to micromanagement of the police by imposing strict policies and performance measures.

The central legal issues differ greatly from one country to another. In some countries, there are many legal changes, already in place or expected to come into force in the (near) future, with a tough impact on the police. In other countries, such as Germany, important legal changes do not seem to play a major role – at least as of now and with respect to the two German states where the interviews were conducted. In this respect, there is a large difference be-

tween the countries that still need to adapt their legal structure to European standards, such as the Republic of Macedonia and Romania, and the mature Western democracies with well-established legal practices.

First practical insights of COMPOSITE

COMPOSITE's first year generated four practical insights worth emphasising.

1. Mapping trends (e.g., ICT projects), the PEST analysis and the state of the art in knowledge sharing all imply a value in themselves. Police forces all over Europe are to a large extent unaware of initiatives, discussions, topics and, in general, what is going on in other countries. Still, knowing about what goes on in other police forces is not only vital to generate trust and understanding, and to facilitate cooperation, but also to stimulate sensible organisational change initiatives based on tested best practices.
2. For the development of strategies at the European level, a good overview of similarities and differences of police forces is a core prerequisite. It is known from cross-cultural communication in the business context that especially seeming similarities provide here the biggest threat. Also, when police forces across countries agree that, say, economic shortfalls and societal changes provide the largest trigger for change, they often actually mean widely varying implications and manifestations.
3. The context dependency of topics that are often considered as culture-free, such as technology, needs specific attention. We have strong indications that the use of technology does not only differ, but often taps on the core of the cultural identity of police forces. A Europe wide adaptation of specific technologies without explicitly acknowledging the specific contexts could easily lead to major resistance in some countries.
4. Police forces underestimate the importance of a context-specific analysis of a core asset such as knowledge sharing. It is of vital importance for the successful broad implementation of knowledge sharing that the conditions of the specific police force are understood, and it would be a fundamental misunderstanding to assume that insights generated in other, typically Anglo-Saxon, countries could be directly implemented in each country. Police forces need to generate local knowledge to understand the specific conditions and meanings which organisational tools – such as knowledge sharing – imply.

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