Developing local security intelligence in German and French police forces – Bringing together two knowledge cultures through the CODISP project

Thierry DELPEUCH¹, Thomas SCHEFFER²

¹ CENTRE MARC BLOCH, CNRS, MAE, Université Humboldt de Berlin, Friedrichstrasse 191, D-10117 Berlin
² INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Universitätsstrasse 3b
D-10117 Berlin

delpeuch@cmb.hu-berlin.de, thomas.scheffer@sowi.hu-berlin.de


Abstract – CODISP is a cultural and social science project on recent forms of knowledge management work in the law enforcement organization. The aim is to analyze the way knowledge management in law enforcement (its methods and forms, as well as the means and degree of knowledge sharing), on the one hand, and the knowledge-based law enforcement work (in regard to social environments and types of tort), on the other hand, interact. The project traces and tries to understand the specific work flows occurring in the everyday work of law enforcement staff. In that respect, enabling police officers to handle the issues actually arising is what the main focus is on. We look into the question of what role innovative concepts (such as “intelligence-led policing”) play in police work. How can they be applied? How are they reviewed and adapted locally? We provide insights into the operating mode of specific law enforcement intelligence measures, including attempts to monitor and improve them. On that base, we supply demonstration materials for training teams in the sense of “learning organizations”.

Introduction

Through Europe and North America, police services are increasingly turning towards proactive, problem-oriented approaches. Some cultivate, what is called “intelligence-led policing” - even down to the local level. The research hinges on this general trend in order to renew the understanding of the practical relations of local knowledge and organizational knowledge especially in the field of security. It focuses on an important aspect of practical police work and scientific research alike: the translation and mobilization of ad hoc (local) knowledge into organizational knowledge. The CODISP project analyzes and compares the knowledge cultures that evolve with the prevalent demands of preventive, proactive and problem-oriented policing. It does so in order to initiate and support actual organizational investments into the strengthening of the “intelligence function”, as well as into the professionalization and the “infostructure” (Pan and Scarbrough 1999) of this now omnipresent branch of police work.

Our research looks at the ways local knowing can be translated – or should at times not be translated – into intelligence that matters for local security networks and policies. And, reversely, we aim to determine how and to what extent intelligence can be subject to learning and appropriation by professionals who accomplish...
operational and supervising missions. Moreover, the research assesses the impact of the practical implementation of organizational process, tools and systems which can be considered as components of the “intelligence function” inside police services, as well as the effect of the use by police organizations of knowledge which have been produced by other local actors who share information with the police. To put it simply, the project studies to what extent and how, both within and across Germany and France, intelligence-led policing tools and systems can make their way into various knowledge cultures of different police units and organizations, and how these tools and systems can help police forces to give appropriate answers to the new demands of problem-oriented, preventive and proactive policing?

1. Intelligence-led policing in context

According to the literature, collecting, managing, analyzing, and exploiting information related to security has become a central aspect in daily police work. It did so to the extent that sociologists now describe police officers as “knowledge workers” (Haggerty and Ericson, 2005, 2000, 1997). Similarly, information is considered as a “general paradigm of ordinary police activities” (Brodeur, 2003). Police agencies are assessed as “learning organizations” that cultivate more or less restricted knowledge economies. However, the police cannot be preconceived as one homogenous body. “Personal knowing” and “organizational knowledge” (Hughes and Jackson 2004) remain distinct and necessary epistemic qualities within the organization.

1.1 A new police doctrine

Since the beginning of the 2000’s, a research movement on police activities has been specifically focusing their studies on the relationship between knowledge and action when dealing with security problems. This collection of works, essentially Anglo-Saxon, proclaimed a new police doctrine: intelligence-led policing. Until today, however, this doctrine caused conceptual problems. Is it a separated mode of policing? Or is it a component next to others in rather traditional modes (Ratcliffe 2003)? Is it just a new managerial discourse which remains largely disconnected from the common “case approach” process of knowledge construction in law enforcement organizations? What is more: are there functional equivalents of the Anglo-Saxon notion of “law enforcement intelligence” in terms of knowledge management within the French and German police, such as local knowing or knowledge networks? Our research envisages these conceptual matters as empirical questions: how do the French and German police services respond to the new knowledge demands/offers that come about especially with preventive and proactive police work?

The academic studies on intelligence-led policing emphasize the role of information gathering and analysis in the management of police activities and in the governance of security policies. They focus on how police organizations discover, recognize, categorize, interpret and understand the various issues relating to safety, crime and disturbance of public order. They examine how the development of an “intelligence function” can influence the functioning and outputs of police organizations, but also, more broadly, on the governance of local security policies. The research moves these approaches back to the daily police work and, by doing so, considers the potentials and limitations of new forms (and doctrines) of knowledge management practices.

These knowledge management practices within the police involve a range of activities which aim to:

- collect and manage relevant information for the actors in charge of prevention and security issues,
- assess the threat level represented by these issues in order to determine what problems have to be targeted in priority,
- produce and distribute knowledge about these issues to elaborate practical solutions and their implementation,
- and evaluate the impact of the actions taken.

The knowledge management should confer upon local actors a pragmatic understanding of situations and problems that can be turned into action strategies (Lemieux, 2006). It should also solicit suggestions and approaches to crime reduction. The knowledge, or intelligence, should increase the capacity to anticipate critical situations, misdemeanors and disorders. They should also allow stakeholders to rationalize the use of their resources. The latter should focus their attention and effort on the problems that contribute the most to the deterioration of security. Knowledge management does not only aim to increase the quality of information released to decision-makers, but also to increase their ability to use the analysis elaborated especially for them.

As Jerry Ratcliffe (2002) indicates, the introduction of intelligence-led policing initiatives encourage police organizations to go beyond a narrow and reactive conception of raw information exploitation, characterized by the predominance of information that derives from citizen complaints and criminal enquiries, which both are collected after incidents have happened. The doctrine, in line with problem-centered policing, prefers a comprehensive and proactive conception, which allows for a preventive attitude towards various forms of criminality and public disorder.

Beyond the police force, all public actors likely to contribute to insecurity reduction are to evolve towards more “proactive” and “strategic” action modes. In such a system, there is a great need for active information research and scientific problem analysis, just like there is a need to calculate the best value costs/advantages for operational measures set up to respond to the problems
(Maguire, 2000, Maguire et John, 2006). In general, the new forms of policing demand for a security management where profitability and performance have become essential parameters (Lemieux, 2006). This evolution fits in a wider movement of “managerialization” of public policies (Delpeuch, 2006) – and brings about new legal, professional, and practical problems caused by rising bureaucracy and formality.

1.2 The implementation of the doctrine in various Countries

Great-Britain is in the vanguard of the international movement of intelligence-led policing development, as it set up in 2004 a National Intelligence Model (NIM, the result of a study started in 2000) whose role was to standardize and promote the new intelligence practices and tools. Information is processed at three interconnected levels local, regional, and national. Each level is equipped with its own intelligence management tools – intelligence units, various committees where police chiefs can gain knowledge about the “burning problems” from analysts and from representatives of other public and private organizations. What is more, each level is asked to adopt a learning attitude towards its own routines and work practices. The police services are expected to function as branches of a learning organization.

In the United States, since the September 11th 2001 attacks, police forces have been encouraged by federal authorities to carry out reforms based on the intelligence-led policing doctrine. A national development program has been set up with the aim to modernize equipment, to improve professional training, generalize good practices, and to share information between police agencies at different levels. The American doctrine implies that all local police forces – whatever their size and organization mode – should develop the ability to manage and exploit efficiently the information gathered from an extensive range of open and closed sources, as well as to transmit the knowledge generated from that information to the internal and external actors who most need it to carry out their security tasks. Local police must also be able to receive, manage, and build on information coming from external institutional sources. All the components of police organization are hard-pressed to acquire a culture of information (Carter, 2004). Intelligence-led policing in the United States is in line with the problem solving approaches that came about in the 1990s and which consist in identifying the causes of security problems using tools and analysis methods which enable the development of responses towards the actual causes of criminality and public disorder. Some experts criticize that problem-oriented policing failed exactly because of a lack of analytical capacities inside police organizations (Eck and Spelman, 1989).

By contrast, in France, the interest in intelligence-led policing has only emerged recently. The interest arose when the system of national security intelligence was reformed in 2007 and 2008. Since then, new intelligence tools were created to provide local police services with analytical products which are supposed to improve decision processes for operational and tactical purposes. However, the efficiency of the tools and methods largely remains to be assessed until today. And, the know-how that has been constituted either at the central level needs or in the context of local initiatives needs, in order to be spread all across the country, a broad and rich conceptual apparatus that allows any assessment to identify functional equivalents in the police knowledge management. Here, our heuristic distinction of local and organizational knowledges and the analysis of their translation into each other marks out a valuable starting point for grounded research.

One of the prominent aspects of the French intelligence know-how, which should be carefully compared with similar German experiences, is the emergence deliberative forms of information aggregation and problem analysis which have gradually emerged from the development of local security partnerships since the beginning of the 80’s. These forms of joint-production of law enforcement intelligence take place in various types of local security committees, information sharing networks and bilateral inter-institutional cooperation. These partnerships associate actors such as municipalities, courts, social services, schools, public transportation, housing projects... Their degree of formalization and institutionalization varies depending on the sites and on the issues. On the whole, they have allowed actors characterized by different knowledge cultures, professional interpretation frameworks and institutional interests to learn how to exchange information and how to discuss about possible responses to the problems. In many French localities, the inter-organizational sharing of information and analysis has become an established practice which influences the decision making process in the organizations which are integrated in security networks. In some territories, these practices have strongly contributed to improve the outcomes of local security policies.

In the case of Germany, the research is confronted with another diverse picture. The police is administered on the state level, complemented by self-organized networks in the municipalities. Here, local security concepts gave rise to an enormous diversity of projects themselves specialized on “burning issues”, on “hot spots” with a mix of security/criminality matters, or on “target groups”. Through these initiatives, preventive/proactive policing grew to an important part of daily police work. Now, it does not just collaborate with social work, but shares some of its social properties including its client-centered perspective. This transformation of police work caused new demands on the level of education, as well as new demands for the organisational culture as such. In terms of knowledge work, these developments towards proactive policing have been managed rather on the project level,
less within the police organization as a whole. German Police schools aim to meet these new demands in terms of social learning and reflection (such as anti-racism training). The dimensions of knowledge work and “learning organizations” – plus their inherent limitations – await further attention.

In the German context, because of the heterogeneous and decentralized structure of the Police services, intelligence-led policing never turned into a paradigm or doctrine. Intelligence-led policing is reserved to special analytical units on the federal level. For instance, the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) – together with European partners – develops techniques of “geographical and strategic early detection” in order to “reveal connections between different phenomena” and “to prepare the police force to make steps in terms of setting objectives, planning strategies, and prioritizing policies” (www.cepol.europa.eu). Such scenario techniques differentiated by types of delinquency seem to overburden local security networks. On a daily level, “intelligence” is restricted to ad hoc risk assessments involving an intimate understanding of participants and their ‘normal’ actions. Local police work focuses on -careful, acceptable, operational – networking, the building of trusty relationships, and at times the advancement of its applied, organizational knowledge economy.

2. Analyzing knowledge-led policing in France and Germany

Some sociologists see knowledge-led or intelligence-led policing as a managerial discourse which, deep down, is unlikely to alter the vision and the thinking commonplace in the police force. In their opinion, the police force is still a profession orientated more towards coercive action than towards analysis and reflection. Police activities essentially remain focused on reactive responses to occasional events reported to them or detected by them. The function of intelligence, as these researchers observe, is only effectively instrumental in a minimal number of police events and cases (Brodeur and Dupont, 2006). Several authors doubt it would be possible to rationalize information circulation and exploitation in police organizations, as intelligence is traditionally exchanged in an informal and personal manner often reproduced by the dominant mechanisms in professional learning and transmission practices (Manning, 2003, Shearing and Ericson, 1991).

But there are several reasons to consider the emergence of knowledge-led policing as a major expression of a paradigm shift in the field of security policies. Local networks in public security have evolved significantly. Hypothetically, they render intelligence systems more useful and applicable: territorialization of public action, generalization of contractual and partnership initiatives and widening (through different forms of mediation, prevention and citizen involvement) of the range of responses to be used in dealing with security problems. In such a context, for local security policies to be effective, the knowledge economy needs to fulfill a number of requirements: the capacity to understand local specificities, the aptitude to share pertinent information with local public and private partners, collective deliberation of the significance of collected data as well as the capacity to use shared information and knowledge for the joint elaboration of coordinated action strategies. Moreover, the doctrine expects police organizations to improve their effectiveness despite their decreasing means, which invites them to equip themselves with knowledge tools in order to make better use of the resources already obtained by members of the organization on various levels.

2.1 A comparative approach to study knowledge based policing and the ways to improve it

Our comparative study take on these managerial changes will contribute to these debates on a substantial basis: firstly, by comparing the various national articulations of an international doctrine as such; secondly, by showing how exactly the status of various knowledges in institutionally diverse police organizations; thirdly, our grounded research will specify the practical relevancy of knowledge environments and knowledge tools beyond mere self-descriptions of the respective police services. Our aim is to come close to the complex and integrated police-work and to introduce basic improvements for these situations.

Comparing the French and the German cases lies at the heart of this endeavor. The comparison is performed in four steps:

(1) Mapping the fields: We map our respective fields according to the organizational structures, hierarchy levels, programs of good practice, and formal/procedural paths. The institutional maps is used as patterns of possibility, meaning as a framework that shows how certain modes of knowing and forms of knowledge are feasible at certain sites within the respective organization. This includes prescriptions for the aggregation, storage and compiling of data, the use of electronic format versus paper copies and reports, etc.

(2) Grounded practice research: On these grounds, we organize our practice research. We place field researchers in selected sections of policing, where they will conduct a lengthy thorough ethnographic observation of the daily knowledge-work (4-6 weeks in each setting). These sections are differently confronted with the requirements of knowledge-led policing. They serve these requirements differently according to the practical, local limitations that are themselves to be taken seriously as pragmatic tactics and rationales. Only on these informed grounds do we develop semi-standardized interviews in other cities and on various hierarchy levels: we conduct a series of 1-2 weeks “short studies” of 10-15 particular
localities in each country, mainly based on interviews and documentary analysis, as well as a series of visits in police academies in France, Germany, Great-Britain and The United States.

(3) Thick comparison: Grounded in the local police work, we discern relevant patterns and factors of knowledge-led policing. This assures that the research is empirical driven; that it links up on the actual experiences and competencies of practitioners. This way, we will thicken our research in this bottom-up methodology: from real cases (fieldwork research) to general organizational patterns (semi-standardized interviews).

(4) Integrating basic analytical perspectives on knowledge in learning organizations: The literature on learning organizations starts from two basic analytical perspectives. It focuses either on knowledge production or on knowledge consumption. Our research integrates these two directions in order to compare the info- and infrastructures in diverse police organizations. The analytical question reads like this: What local knowledges are produced within security networks and how, if at all, do these knowledges circulate in the police organization? And: Is knowledge produced for or consumed by ways of geo-coding analysis, criminal investigative analysis, tactical crime analysis (pattern identification relevant for the deployment of the patrols), strategic analysis (for resource allocation of personnel and materiel), etc.?

(5) Comparing practical solutions: Our joint research projects aims for best practice cases in order to analyze in detail the practical solutions that made these successes possible. The practical solutions will be presented in workshops to academics and, more so, police practitioners from France and Germany. By narrating and analyzing these positive cases, we aim for new intern organizational publics that allow knowledges to circulate more freely to those members that are in need for a broader repertoire of practical solutions.

(6) Results, diagnostic and applied: As a result we will be able to characterize the respective epistemic cultures of policing beyond mere national containers. Parts of these cultures are programs, techniques, professional solutions, and attitudes towards knowledge production/consumption. Knowledge-led policing is put in context(s) by then and can be reformulated as a doctrine in more realistic and embedded terms. Rather than celebrating doctrines, we will downsize them to their actual potential and limitation.

2.2 Identifying good practices in the field of public security intelligence

Scientific works dedicated to intelligence-led policing have underlined four types of pitfalls for organizations and actor networks attempting to increase the role of the function of intelligence in the managing of their activities: the agents’ reluctance to adopt formalized and standardized modes of information conservation and transmission, the appearance of tensions between operational and specialized intelligence staff, the difficulty to obtain resources in order to implement intelligence-led actions in organizations already saturated by multiple charges and demands, and finally, the difficulty of producing information and analyses with a sufficient level of quality to be usable in action.

Our research establish when such problems have arisen on the studied sites and, if they have, which responses were used. More generally, it will renew the knowledge and the understanding of public action development and behavior processes in the security field, focusing on an aspect of the local management that is not often studied and which is the production, the interpretation, the circulating and the use of information and knowledge.

What is more, we isolate the conditions and processes which enhance learning and allow the use of concepts, thinking modes, work methods and technical tools inherently linked to public security intelligence, by local security actors. The comparison of these components will assist the grounded modeling of learning organizations in the field of policing.

Moreover, our joint research will qualify the human dimension of the processes by which the knowledge systems of the function of intelligence operates. Previous research suggests that even if more and more sophisticated tools are made available to agents involved in this function, improving professional capacities constitutes the first condition necessary to the enhanced production / consumption – and circulation - of knowledges.

In order to analyze the organized processes of knowledge production / consumption, we aim to answer rather detailed research questions:

- Within organizations and services taking part, how do the different types of concerned agents mobilize the resources given by the function of intelligence? In the solving of which situations and problems are organizational knowledges considered in-/appropriate?
- What actors are receptive to the offered knowledges and methods? How do they justify the use of organizational knowledge and what drives / delimits their knowledge production for the organization? How does the career profile, the training, and the professional experiences matter?
- On the contrary, what actors put up a passive or active resistance to the development of the function of intelligence? How do they explain and justify this resistance? How can we utilize the critique in order to offer more appropriate knowledge systems meeting the ethical, legal, and social requirements highlighted by these local critiques?

We ask the same questions in our two respective fields. We endeavor to determine the practicalities and local conditions that promote or, on the contrary, inhibit the coproduction of knowledges in prevention projects, municipal initiatives, and task forces.
The studies on the development of intelligence-led policing in the United States and Great Britain have shown that elaborating such a doctrine plays a tremendous role in the reinforcement of the function of intelligence and analysis within interior security forces and partnership networks.

The rationalization of knowledge processes implies that there is a range of principles, rules and procedures to be applied to the different phases: e.g. acquiring the rules and sources, appreciating them in their relevance and reliability, turning local experiences into data, turning data into circulation, sharing data with operational units capable of exploiting them, updating knowledge in the light of new insights, and frequently assessing the knowledge processes. Furthermore, the knowledge processes need to be subject to organization, management and specific development with the involvement of the relevant units. Our objective: we give the authorities willing to undertake such policies a wide insight into the possible methods and designs.

In police organizations, the quality of knowledge and analysis processes depends on the weight given to it by all personnel and services. Knowledge has a personal source and author to it. They qualify or disqualify knowledges – and allow for additional inquiries or upfront usage. In particular, units who have special access to the best sources (e.g., operational units) must get used to transmitting it to knowledge systems: in a selective manner (screening out unreliable or useless information), in the necessary format, with the adequate level of detail, whilst observing a certain number of precautions. All this refers to the wider epistemic culture, in which knowledge processes are embedded.

Our own attempts to stabilize and rationalize knowledge-led policing in public security refer to an existing nexus of research in the management, information, and policing studies. In terms of its development at the level of local actor networks, several works (Donzelot and Wyvekens, 1998, INTERSECTS study) have shown that the viability and the efficiency of partnership systems depend on their aptitude in adopting rules and procedures, both formal and informal, that encourage exchange productivity, fuel trust between participants and avoid inter-organizational conflicts. The organization and formalization of information distribution is more likely to be successful when it is preceded with a prior assessment of the needs and capacities of the different partners. Thus, the knowledge system requires an overview of the different possible organizational forms of a partnership intelligence system at local level, as well as the approaches that can be initiated to increase the quality of exchanges within such a system (diagnosis, consultation, performance monitoring, implementation of adequate technical tools, conditions to be respected in terms of confidentiality and compliance with the rights and liberties of citizens, etc.).

Our research contributes to these demands by adding up an inventory of the good practices (more or less) effectively implemented by interior security forces and partnership bodies, French and German, in the public security intelligence sector. It will examine in detail the functioning of units, services, organizations and partnership networks which have demonstrated a strong capacity to obtain, analyze and exploit efficiently information and knowledge in local security problems. Moreover, it will draw lessons for both countries on the reflections and experience developed in the other country. This inventory in both countries will constitute a repertoire of elements “ready to use” in the elaboration of a general public security intelligence doctrine. The communication of this inventory toward professionals in local settings will take the form of a “practical solutions and best practices directory”.

Any knowledge-led policing involving both, local knowledges and organizational knowledge, implies a whole range of professional skills: organizing and stimulating knowledge sharing within police services and partnership networks, knowing how to deal with and exploit information provided by partners, being capable of a constructive dialogue with partners with regards to information interpretation, knowing how to identify the likely characteristics of problems in a perspective of prevention, defending the viewpoints of one’s own institution, assessing collectively the results of taken actions, etc. These skills need to travel within the organization in order to provide a solid and broad foundation for a knowledge-system to work.

The objective of the research is, thus, to supply police services with training and human resource tools dedicated to turn implicit professional knowledge into explicit and accessible knowledge for colleagues and partners. To that end, the research will list and assess the existing training courses in France and Germany in the public security intelligence sector, so as to supply police schools with elements to enrich their training didactics and technologies. In principle, the best-practice approach needs to be translated into training concepts. This involves the early stages of human resources development: the recruitment, the job descriptions, the skill standards, and career profiles. It involves, moreover, the professional culture that involves boundary work within the organization and towards potential partners and audiences ‘outside’.

Références


