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PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLICE PROFESSION: AN INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION

Bayerl, P. S.,¹ Horton, K. E.,¹ Jacobs, G.,¹ Rogiest, S.,² Reguli, Z.,³ Gruschinske, M.,⁴ Constanzo, P.,⁵ Stojanovski, T.,⁶ Vonas, G.,⁷ Gasco, M.,⁸ and Elliott, K.⁹

¹Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam, ²Department of Management, University of Antwerp, ³Department of Gymnastics and Combatives, Masaryk University, Czech Republic, ⁴Institute of Police Science, University of Applied Sciences of the State Police of Brandenburg, ⁵ FORMIT, Rome, ⁶MARRI Regional Centre, Skopje Republic of Macedonia, ⁷Department of Psychology, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania, ⁸Institute of Public Governance and Management, ESADE-Ramon Llull University, Spain, and ⁹Durham University Business School, UK.

Abstract

Purpose. Our study aims to clarify the diversity of professional perspectives on police culture in an international context.

Design/methodology/approach. In a first step we developed a standardized instrument of 45 occupational features for comparative analysis of police professional views. This set was inductively created from 3441 descriptors of the police profession from a highly diverse sample of 166 police officers across eight European countries. Using this standardized instrument, Q-methodological interviews with another 100 police officers in six European countries were conducted.

Findings. We identified five perspectives on the police profession suggesting disparities in officers' outlooks and understanding of their occupation. Yet, our findings also outline considerable overlaps in specific features considered important or unimportant across perspectives.

Research limitations/implications. Our study emphasizes that police culture needs to be described beyond the logic of distinct dimensions in well-established typologies. Considering specific features of the police profession determines which aspects police officers agree on across organizational and national contexts and which aspects are unique.

Practical implications. Our feature-based approach provides concrete pointers for the planning and implementation of (inter)national and inter-organizational collaborations as well as organizational change.

Originality/value. This study suggests an alternative approach to investigate police culture. It further offers a new perspective on police culture that transcends context-specific boundaries.

Keywords: Police culture, professional identity, police profession, professional perspectives, cooperation, organizational change

Article type: Research paper

1. Introduction

A shared understanding of what it means ‘to be an officer’ allows police officers to rely on common expectations and predefined roles, when dealing with colleagues in their own force or other organizations (Paoline, 2004). Such a shared perspective on one’s own profession provides common goals and codes of behavior, and thus helps to facilitate coordination as well as to reduce uncertainty in collaborations with others. In contrast, discrepancies in ostensibly ‘shared’ professional outlooks can have highly negative consequences for collaboration across workgroups, forces or even countries (Marenin, 2005).

The current discussion on police culture reflects this tension between common understanding and differentiation (Ingram et al., 2013; Paoline, 2004). The traditional school, mainly grounded in ethnographic methods, describes police culture as a monolithic phenomenon. Police culture is here understood as a commonly shared answer to the joint requirements and challenges in the police occupation (Skolnick, 1966; van Maanen, 1975). More recent research aims to identify variations within police cultures by developing typologies and by describing specific differences in attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Paoline, 2004; Tait, 2011). These efforts, however, tend to focus on individual officers ignoring the role of environmental influences. This is problematic as perceptions about one’s own work are impacted by one’s organizational as well as national context (e.g., Glynn, 2000; Pratt and Rafaeli, 2007). Ingram and colleagues (2013:366) accordingly requested “to move beyond conceptualizations of police culture as either a purely monolithic or an individual-level phenomenon”. The relevance of a more collective

view was demonstrated in their own study, which showed that officers' occupational attitudes were shaped by the group in which they worked (Ingram et al., 2013).

With this paper we aim to contribute to this debate of a broader view on police culture. Given the increasing importance of inter-organizational and international collaborations for police, our interest is twofold. On the one hand, we are interested in potential disparities of professional perspectives across countries that can predict barriers to collaboration; on the other hand, we are interested in communalities, which can identify opportunities of trust-building and shared understanding. Our study thus aims not only to clarify the diversity of professional perspectives on police culture in an international context, but also to describe the similarities in concrete terms. For this purpose our investigation used a standardized, feature-based approach conducting Q-methodological interviews with 100 police officers in six European countries. Based on this analysis, we identified five different perspectives of 'what it means to be a police officer'. At the same time we also identified a large number of shared aspects across officers' perceptions. In detailing these differences and similarities our study provides an alternative approach to investigate police culture that takes diversity explicitly into account.

1.1 The relevance of context in understanding police culture

Often it is assumed that basic police values can be taken for granted across forces and countries (Crank, 2004; Manning and van Maanen, 1978). Yet, a closer look at how police forces operate and shape their relationship with society suggests that this perception may be problematic.

Differences exist in a wide range of topics from the adoption of community policing (Cassan, 2010) or the usage of social media (Denef et al., 2012) to the degree of officers' trust in the national population (Kääriäinen and Sirén, 2012). These differences are not surprising, as

perceptions of the own profession are shaped by the person's position within the organization as well as the context in which the organization operates (e.g., Pratt and Rafaeli, 2007; Rock and Pratt, 2002). Given the often considerable variations in the political, economic, social, technological and legal conditions experienced by forces in different countries, it can hardly surprise that police officers develop disparate perspectives on what it means to be a police professional.

The importance of the environment, in which policing takes place, finds increasing recognition in discussions of police culture. Sobol (2010), for instance, linked police cynicism to the rate of violent crime in a district, illustrating the influence of the ecological context on officers' attitudes. Such disparities in professional perspectives are of practical relevance in as far as they are linked to actual behaviors. Prison officers with disparate understandings of 'care', for instance, may treat prisoners in very different ways (Tait, 2011). Yet, while past research has done much to increase our understanding of attitudes in specific groups or contexts, the impact of the broader organizational and national context remains an understudied domain.

1. 2 Approaches to differentiate police cultures

A number of attempts have been made to describe and systematize differences between professional perspectives of police officers. Most often these attempts resulted in typologies that suggest a small number of distinct types. Creating a first typology, White (1972) differentiated four groups based on the type of values held by an officer and the application of techniques. Splitting the two dimensions into particularistic versus universalistic approaches she proposed the four profiles of 'tough cop', 'problem-solver', 'rule-applier' and 'crime-fighter'. A similar typology was developed by Brown (1981) based on the two dimensions 'aggressiveness' and

‘selectivity’. Defined by their operational style he also suggested four types, which he referred to as ‘old-style crime-fighter’, ‘clean-beat crime-fighter’, ‘service style’ and ‘professional style’. Other efforts, either based on empirical work (e.g., Paoline, 2004; Tait, 2011) or theoretical considerations (e.g., Broderick, 1977; Muir, 1977) resulted in similar typologies.

Remarkably, nearly all typologies describe very similar profiles, whether they were developed empirically or theoretically, and independent of the underlying dimensions. In a review of early approaches Worden (1995) summarized them into five disparate officer types: ‘professional’, ‘tough cop’, ‘clean-beat crime-fighter’, ‘problem-solver’ and ‘avoider’. He suggested that the belief system underlying these types was equally based on two value-orientations: the view on human nature and an orientation towards process or outcome. These two orientations determine, how police officers perceive their role (e.g., whether crime control or helping people is the main function of police), their attitudes towards the public, and whether they receive their satisfaction in doing their tasks or in seeing a criminal punished by the courts.

Clearly, police scholars agree that disparate perspectives on the police profession exist. However, little agreement exists as to which dimensions exactly differentiate among types (cp. Paoline, 2003). Moreover, because handling more than two dimensions becomes unwieldy very quickly, typologies tend to be restricted to only two dimensions, which reduces the possible range and granularity of differentiation of police perspectives (Worden, 1995). As Osland and Bird (2000) argue, bipolar patterns, i.e. dimensions like collectivism versus individualism, make cultural behaviors appear paradoxical, because cultural dimensions are than framed as dualistic, either-or continua. In reality, they argue, cultural phenomena, as social phenomena more generally, cannot be sufficiently described by simple dimensional characteristics. Therefore an extended model of cultural sense-making, which incorporates also situational and contextual

information, such as the history of a specific business or policing sector, provides a more realistic way of understanding culture (Osland and Bird, 2000).

This reasoning also applies in research that focuses on the analysis of differences in occupational attitudes of police officers. Next to psychological variables such as trust in citizens or reactions to aggressive patrols, research should consequently also incorporate macro-variables such as the structure and history of the legal policing framework in specific countries, the economic situation of the different countries or local HR-policies to enhance the predictive validity of the reported attitudes on policing behavior. Yet, so far most descriptions of police perspectives were developed based on data from one force or from forces within one country (e.g., Ingram et al., 2013; Paoline, 2004; Sobol, 2010).

Our objective in this study was to investigate police professional perspectives across a range of organizational and national settings to allow for diversity in influencing factors on the micro- and macro-level. We therefore collected data from a highly diverse police sample in terms of gender, hierarchy, functions and organizational and cultural contexts. In our effort to detail disparities as well as similarities, we opted for a standardized approach based on concrete features of the police occupation, aiming to avoid the restrictiveness of dimensional approaches. In the following sections we outline our methodological approach and findings, before discussing the practical implications of our work for police forces.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research approach

For our investigation into police professional perspectives we chose an exploratory approach in two steps. In a first step, we identified relevant occupational features of the police profession

based on a diverse, international group of officers. In the subsequent step, we compared these features in a second, independent group of officers. The benefit of this exploratory approach is that it allows for the free emergence of structures, while still being based on established qualitative and quantitative methods.

To develop the standardized set of occupational features, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 166 police officers across eight European countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, and UK) varying in gender, specialization and rank. In these interviews participants were asked to describe in 21 statements “what it means to be a police officer”. This method is based on the 20-statement test (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954), which gathers unstructured textual information by asking participants to write down 20 statements on a sheet of paper. These statements are then processed using thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2008). In line with the spirit of the test, we gave participants no specifications on the number of words, type of statements, valence, content, etc., i.e., participants remained completely free in the phrasing of their statements. All participants wrote the statements in their native language to allow for ease of expression and the natural flow of associations. In total we collected 3441 statements describing the defining aspects of the police profession as seen by its members. The features ranged from “being athletic” and “a good listener” to “needs knowledge of laws”, “carries weapons”, “provides a stable paycheck” and “best job in the world”. Using a text-analytic approach with repeated cycles of coding to identify overarching themes (Braun and Clark, 2008; Miles and Huberman, 1994) these statements were thematically grouped into 18 content categories in five overarching clusters. The five clusters addressed features of the individuals working in the police profession, features of the work police officers do, features of the environment in which police work is conducted, features of the

police profession itself, and the valence officers gave to their profession. This content structure of professional features provided the basis for the standardized feature set.

The standardized approach used Q-methodology (McKeown and Thomas, 1988) to identify feature-based disparities and similarities of professional police perspectives in our sample. Q-methodology uses a card sorting technique, in which a fixed set of statements is employed for all participants. Participants sort the cards by indicating agreement or disagreement with the statements. The ratings are used to statistically cluster people according to the similarity of their views as well as to detail the qualitative differences among these views. Q-methodology is an exploratory, quantitative approach, which does not require a-priori assumptions about the possible number of groups or the attributes that differentiate between groups. It is therefore used in cases in which no previous knowledge about the type of groups or the type of differences between groups exists. For the standardized set of features to be used in the Q-sorting, we chose the three most frequently named features in 15 themes across four of the five clusters (excluding the ‘profession’ cluster; naturalistic Q-sample; McKeown and Thomas 1988). This led to a set of 45 features. The original formulations from step 1 were rephrased to fit the formula “Police officers need to have/be...” (e.g., “Police officers need to be empathic” or “...need to have knowledge of foreign languages”; see Table 3 in the findings section for the full set of statements). The formulation “need to have/be” was chosen to elicit strong reactions of agreement or disagreement in participants.

2.2 Sample

Our study was based on a total of 100 officers across six countries: Belgium (10 officers), Czech Republic (25 officers), Italy (15 officers), Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (16 officers),

Netherlands (19 officers), and United Kingdom (15 officers).^[1] The police forces in our sample were local police forces in urban areas with the exception of Macedonia and Italy, which both targeted nationally operating forces. Our sample consisted of 78% male officers. The average age across all countries was 41.8 years (range: 22–59 years). To obtain a comprehensive picture of the police profession we included a wide range of police ranks. 33% were operational-level personnel ranking from trainee to constable first class (on the UK scale of police ranks), 30% supervisory personnel (sergeant and inspector) and 37% senior personnel operating at upper echelons of the hierarchy, including those in superintendent, commissioner and chief commissioner positions. For an overview of sample characteristics per country see Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Country	Gender	Rank	Age (years)
Belgium	Female: 1 Male: 9	Operational: 4 Supervisory: 3 Top: 3	M=49.4 SD=7.62
Czech Republic	Female: 6 Male: 19	Operational: 8 Supervisory: 8 Top: 9	M=41.6 SD=7.80
Italy	Female: 3 Male: 12	Operational: 6 Supervisory: 3 Top: 6	M=40.47 SD=8.44
Macedonia	Female: 6 Male: 10	Operational: 6 Supervisory: 5 Top: 5	M=39.63 SD=8.53
Netherlands	Female: 2 Male: 16 Unknown: 1	Operational: 4 Supervisory: 7 Top: 8	M=42.68 SD=10.01
UK	Female: 7 Male: 8	Operational: 5 Supervisory: 4 Top: 6	M=39.4 SD=6.61

2.3 Data collection and analysis

The Q-sort sessions were conducted with each participant individually by interviewers located in the respective country. All interviewers were academic researchers, i.e., not linked to the police

organizations. The participants were asked to sort the 45 features in a fixed distribution of eleven columns ranging from *least important* (-5) to *most important* (+5; neutral point 0). The number of cards per column was predetermined and arranged in the form of a flat normal distribution (e.g. only two cards could be placed in the most extreme categories, seven cards in the neutral point). To capture individual perspectives the instruction explicitly stated that participants should sort the cards according to their *personal view* of what it means to be a police officer.

The analysis of the 100 Q-sorts was carried out using the specialized software PQMethod (Schmolck, 2002). The identification of the factors was driven by our main interest in identifying the *shared perspectives* of officers (in contrast to identifying positions of specific individuals in a group). Statistically speaking this means aiming to explain a maximum of variance in our sample. As discussed by Watts and Stenner (2005, 2012), this can best be accomplished by the use of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax-rotation. The eigenvalue criterion of 1.0 resulted in 27 possible factors, clearly representing an unfeasibly large number (e.g., Wilson and Cooper, 2008). Starting with the eight factors that can maximally be extracted in PQMethod, we applied Brown's suggestion to exclude factors with less than two significant loadings on a factor (in our case loadings of less than .38) together with Humphrey's rule requesting a cross-product of twice the standard error (in our case > 0.298 ; Brown, 1980; Watts and Stenner, 2012). These two rules again ensured that the focus remained on the retention of factors that emphasized shared orientations between participants (cp. Watts and Stenner, 2005). These criteria led to the extraction of five factors, which together explained 48% of the total variance fulfilling the criterion for a sound factor solution (Kline, 1994; cited in Watts and Stenner, 2012). The factors also provided clearly identifiable perspectives to guide interpretations. We therefore

retained the five-factor structure as final solution. The descriptive statistics for the five factors are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive information for the five factors resulting from Q-analysis

Factor	Number of People Loading on the Factor	Variance Explained	Composite Reliability	S.E. for Factor Z-scores
1	26	10%	0.990	0.098
2	19	13%	0.987	0.114
3	9	9%	0.973	0.164
4	16	9%	0.985	0.124
5	5	7%	0.952	0.218

3. Findings

Each of the five factors identified in our analysis represents a distinct perspective on the police profession within our sample. To understand the differences and overlaps among the five perspectives, we analyzed the most important and least important features in each factor provided by Q-analysis as well as the distinguishing features (i.e., features which differentiated perspectives the most clearly). Table 3 provides a detailed comparison of the five perspectives across the 45 statements. In the following text, we detail our findings outlining the disparities and similarities among the five perspectives, followed by an overview of the distribution across demographic groups.

Table 3. Factor arrays across the 45 statements used in the Q-sorting

Statements (all beginning with ‘Police officers need...’)	Factor Arrays				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
CLUSTER 1: PERSON					
Abilities/Skills					
<i>to be creative</i>	0	-1	0	0	0
<i>to be empathic and able to put him/herself in someone else’s position</i>	3	-1	-2	-3	-2
<i>to be communicative</i>	3	3	3	-4	-5
Attitudes					
<i>to be professional in their behavior and appearance</i>	4	4	2	-1	1
<i>to be hands-on (‘doers not thinkers’)</i>	-4	5	3	4	1
<i>to be aware that they are never ‘off-duty’</i>	-1	-1	1	-2	-2
Personality					
<i>to be brave</i>	0	1	-1	-3	0
<i>to be athletic</i>	-1	-2	0	-4	0

<i>to be curious</i>	-2	-3	0	-3	-1
Values					
<i>to be honest</i>	5	-2	-1	3	-3
<i>to be impartial</i>	3	5	4	4	3
<i>to be tolerant towards disparate cultural practices, expectations, beliefs, etc.</i>	2	4	4	3	2
CLUSTER 2: WORK					
Goals					
<i>to protect civil-rights</i>	5	1	3	2	2
<i>to maintain order</i>	1	1	0	1	3
<i>to restore justice</i>	-1	0	0	0	5
Tasks/behaviors					
<i>to help citizens</i>	4	0	-5	-3	0
<i>to cooperate with groups/organization outside the police</i>	2	3	2	2	2
<i>to work preventively</i>	0	3	-3	-1	2
Job-role					
<i>to act as a representative of the state</i>	-1	-2	-5	-1	5
<i>to act as problem-solvers for citizens</i>	-1	-3	2	2	3
<i>to act as crime fighters</i>	1	0	-1	-1	4
Target groups					
<i>to focus on citizens</i>	1	1	-2	1	4
<i>to focus on offenders</i>	-2	2	0	-2	4
<i>to focus on the government</i>	-5	2	-2	-2	3
CLUSTER 3: ORGANIZATION/ENVIRONMENT					
Physical resources					
<i>good equipment</i>	0	2	2	5	-2
<i>to wear a uniform</i>	-3	0	-1	4	0
<i>to carry weapons</i>	-2	-2	-3	0	-2
Managerial resources					
<i>an academic background/education</i>	-3	-3	1	1	-2
<i>hands-on experience on the street</i>	0	-3	-4	2	0
<i>police professional training</i>	3	0	1	0	-3
Organizational resources					
<i>information/intelligence</i>	2	-4	-3	2	-3
<i>discretion in their actions and decisions</i>	2	2	2	3	-1
<i>authority for the use of force against the public</i>	0	4	-3	0	-1
Knowledge					
<i>knowledge of laws and regulations</i>	4	0	0	-4	-4
<i>knowledge of foreign languages</i>	-4	3	5	5	2
<i>knowledge of computers/technology</i>	-2	-4	-2	0	-3
Internal relationships					
<i>be a team player within their police force</i>	0	0	1	-2	-1
<i>to be loyal towards members of their police force</i>	-2	-1	3	3	1
<i>to respect the hierarchical differences in their police force</i>	-3	-2	1	1	-1
External relationships					

<i>to be transparent in dealing with people/groups outside the police</i>	2	-1	4	1	1
<i>to be repressive in dealing with people/groups outside the police</i>	-3	2	-1	0	1
<i>to be caring in dealing with people/groups outside the police</i>	1	-5	-4	-5	-4
CLUSTER 4: VALENCE					
Outcomes					
<i>to experience excitement and adventure</i>	-5	1	-2	-1	-4
<i>to have job security</i>	-4	-5	-4	-5	-5
<i>to feel pride working for the police</i>	1	-4	5	-2	0

Note: Grey fields: statements at extreme ends of the distribution; Dark grey fields: differentiating features at $p < .01$

3.1 Perspective 1: Professional service-providers

Perspective 1 was characterized by a strong focus on *helping* and *protecting citizens* and *their civil rights*. Citizens were thus the most important target group for police work, while the *government* was rated of relatively low importance. Perspective 1 also had a clear view on how officers should behave in fulfilling their tasks: Officers should be *honest* and *impartial*, but also *communicative* and *empathic*. In contrast, taking a *repressive* stance towards the public was rejected. A strong emphasis was further placed on *professionalism*. This referred, on the one hand to *behaviors and appearance* and on the other hand to *professional police training*, including *knowledge of laws and regulations*. *Being hands-on* (i.e., ‘doers not thinkers’), the experience of *excitement* and *knowledge of foreign languages* were of low relevance, as was the *wearing of uniforms*. Taken together, officers in perspective 1 seemed to define themselves primarily with respect to their relations with the public and the tasks and behaviors shaping these relationships. The main focus lay on being service-providers and helpers for citizens with a strong emphasis on professionalism. Considering the three primary function of police work of crime-fighting, order maintenance and social services (Cole and Smith, 1999), we therefore refer to officers with this perspective as ‘professional service-providers’.

3.2 Perspective 2: Hands-on enforcers

Police officers in perspective 2 described their profession primarily as *impartial* and *hands-on* ('doers not thinkers') with a need for *professionalism in behavior and appearance*. They perceived their main task as *crime prevention* for which they claimed *authority for the use of force* against the public. Their stance was therefore one of enforcement rather than of supporting/helping, as was the case in perspective 1. Consistent with this attitude, officers in perspective 2 considered the need to be *caring* in dealing with groups outside the police and the need to *act as problem-solvers* for the public as rather unimportant. Still, officers should be *communicative*, possess *knowledge of foreign languages*, be *tolerant towards disparate cultural practices, expectations and beliefs*, and *cooperate with groups and organizations outside the police*. Emphasizing the practical, hands-on outlook of this group, resources such as *information/intelligence* and *knowledge about computers/technology* were rated of low importance. Also, being *curious* was low on the list of important features, as were *job security* and feeling *pride working for the police*. Like officers in perspective 1, officers in this second group thus characterized themselves largely over their relationship with the public. Yet, while perspective 1 defined relationships with the public primarily as a professional service to help and protect, perspective 2 emphasized police authority and a hands-on approach. This view thus represents the order maintenance and enforcement aspect of policing (Cole and Smith, 1999). We therefore refer to this group as 'hands-on enforcers'.

3.3 Perspective 3: Community-oriented civil-rights protectors

Perspective 3 was characterized by a strong emphasis on *tolerance* and *transparency* in dealing with groups outside the police. For this, *knowledge of foreign languages* was seen as highly

relevant and to a lesser extent the ability to be *communicative*. Conversely, a position of *authority* was seen as unimportant, which was paired with a low relevance given to *carrying weapons*. The main focus in perspective 3 was thus on personal, non-authoritative relationships with the public, which may also explain the low rating of *being a state representative*. Similar to perspective 2, the main task was seen as the *protection of civil rights*, while *helping citizens* and *crime-prevention* were of low relevance. The latter may also explain the low need for *intelligence/information*. Officers in perspective 3 were also driven by a strong *pride* in working for the police and *loyalty* towards members of their police force. Overall, this group thus expressed a more affective relationship to their profession than officers in the other groups. Perspective 3 shares with perspectives 1 and 2 a focus on external relationships, but lacks the authoritative stance of perspective 2 and the slightly more detached view on relationships in perspective 1. Rather perspective 3 is characterized by a more personal stance toward the public, which emphasizes transparency, tolerance, and communication. At the same time, the main focus is not on helping or crime-prevention but on the more abstract aspect of protecting civil-rights. We therefore refer to people in this perspective as ‘community-oriented civil-rights protectors’.

3.4 Perspective 4: Resource-driven independents

Officers in perspective 4 focused strongly on the instruments and resources needed for their work. To have access to *good equipment* and *knowledge of foreign languages* were seen as the two most important aspects, followed by the need to *wear a uniform*. In contrast, the abilities of the individual officer were considered of low importance: being *athletic*, *brave* or *curious* were all placed at the low end of the distribution. It thus seems that in perspective 4, the abilities an individual officer brings to the profession mattered less than the resources given to fulfil the task.

Still, officers in this group preferred a *hands-on approach* ('doers not thinkers') valuing *autonomy in actions and decisions*. In contrast, *knowledge of laws and regulations* was considered of low importance. At the same time, *loyalty* to members of their own police force was important, whereas *job security* was not. Except for *tolerance* towards disparate cultural practices, expectations and beliefs, features referring to the public or other outside groups such as *caring, empathic, communicative* or the need to *help citizens* were seen as unimportant.

Perspective 4 thus differs from the previous ones in its clear focus on the instruments of the profession and the emphasis on autonomy. The strong emphasis on relationships with the outside prevalent in the previous three perspectives is missing. Perspective 4 thus seems to represent a more instrumental view on the police profession that sees itself as independent from others groups, be it public or government. For this reason we refer to this group as 'resource-driven independents'.

3.5 Perspective 5: State crime-fighters

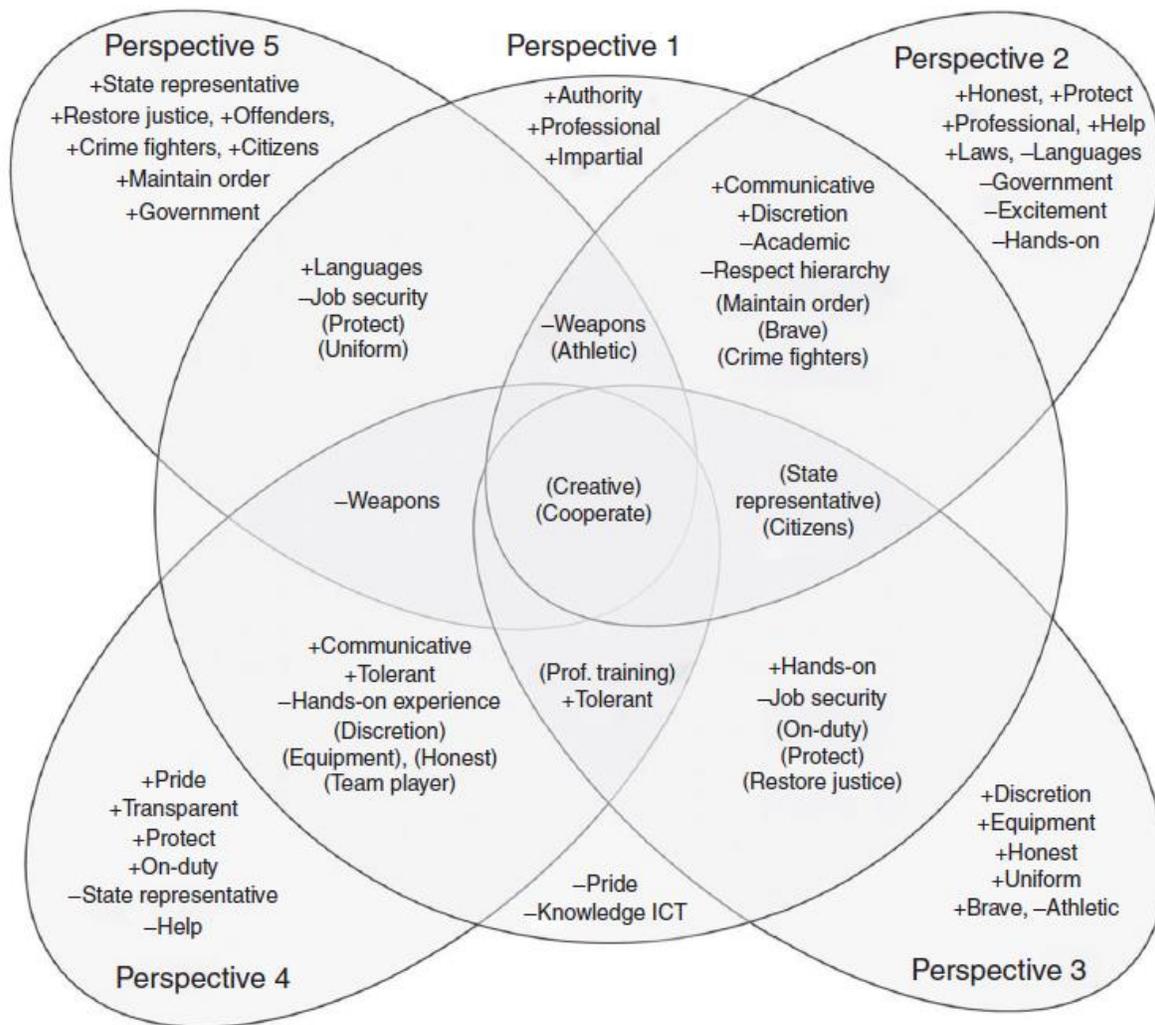
Perspective 5 is unique in that it emphasizes very strongly the law enforcement and crime-fighter aspects of the police profession. In this view, police officers act as *impartial representatives of the state* with the main tasks of *restoring justice, maintaining order, and acting as problem-solvers for citizens*. The primary target groups were *offenders* and *citizens* and to a lesser extent the *government*. In the same regard, aspects that express more personal relationships with the public, such as the need to be *caring* or *communicative*, were seen as less relevant. Likewise, *knowledge of computers/technology, knowledge of laws and regulations* as well as *police professional training* were considered of low importance; so were *job security* and the experience of *excitement and adventure* in doing the job. This perspective thus focuses primarily

on the crime-fighter aspect of police work (Cole and Smith, 1999) including an emphasis on being state representatives. We therefore refer to this perspective as ‘state crime-fighters’.

3.6 Overlaps among perspectives

Despite the clear differences in the main focus of perspectives, we also found considerable overlaps. Ten of the 45 features had a comparable place in the distribution across all five perspectives. To be *tolerant* (ratings from +2 to +4), *impartial* (rated between +3 and +5), and to *cooperate with groups outside the police* (+2 and +3) were considered relevant in all five groups. Six features were rated more neutrally, namely being *creative* (rated 0 or +1), *curious* (0 to -3), a *team player* (0 to -2), *always on-duty* (-2 to +1), the goal to *maintain order* (0 to +3), and the requirement to *carry weapons* (0 to -3). *Job security* was considered irrelevant in all perspectives (rated -4 or -5). Two other features were rated differently in their importance, although demonstrated alignment in the general direction: being *athletic* (0 to -4) and having *knowledge of technology* (0 to -4).

Figure 1 illustrates the differentiating and overlapping features among perspectives. As this comparison indicates, despite their clear disparities, officers in the five perspectives also agreed about a considerable number of professional features. For some perspectives, such as perspective 1 and 2 and perspectives 1 and 4 this overlap was comparatively large, whereas other perspectives (e.g., perspectives 4 and 5) agreed only on very few features. Two assumptions, namely the relevance of *cooperation* and the neutral stance on the need to be *creative*, were shared across all five perspectives. This overview illustrates that despite variations in the emphasis on specific aspects of the police profession, perspectives also possessed shared aspects pointing to shared understandings of the police profession.



Notes: + important features, - unimportant features, neutral features in parenthesis

Figure 1: Differentiating and overlapping features among the five perspectives

In a next step we investigated the distribution of participants across the five perspectives. To test which demographic aspect differentiated the best among perspectives we conducted Chi-square tests for countries, ranks and gender. Only the test for countries was significant ($\chi^2=128.17, p<.001$), whereas tests comparing rank levels and gender remained insignificant ($\chi^2=3.28, ns$; $\chi^2=5.44, ns$). Country thus seemed to be the most relevant aspect in differentiating the groups across factors.

As Table 4 shows, two countries were represented nearly exclusively on one perspective: the Netherlands, where nearly all Q-sorts fell into perspective 1 (professional service-providers), and the UK, for which all sorts fell into perspective 2 (hands-on enforcers). The (nearly) exclusive loading of British and Dutch sorts on a single perspective suggests that participating officers in these two countries possessed a commonly shared outlook on their profession, and that these outlooks were shared across ranks and genders. In contrast, officers from Macedonia and the Czech Republic were distributed much more widely. Macedonian sorts appeared in perspectives 1, 2 and 3; sorts from the Czech Republic even in four perspectives (1, 2, 4 and 5), although with strong emphasis on perspective 1. Belgian and Italian sorts were split to (nearly) equal measure across two perspectives: Belgian sorts between perspectives 1 and 3, Italian sorts between 3 and 4. This suggests that in these groups within our sample views on the police profession were much more varied. Officers from the Netherlands and the UK thus demonstrated a far greater homogeneity in their professional outlook than officers from the other countries.

Table 4. Country and rank distribution across professional perspectives

	Distribution per Country *	Rank Distribution
Perspective 1: Professional service-providers	Netherlands: 57.7% (93.8%) Czech Republic: 42.3% (64.7%)	Operational: 23.1% Supervisory: 34.6% Top: 42.3%
Perspective 2: Hands-on enforcers	United Kingdom: 63.2% (100%) Belgium: 21.1% (50.0%) Macedonia: 10.5% (18.2%) Czech Republic: 5.2% (5.9%)	Operational: 31.6% Supervisory: 21.1% Top: 47.4%
Perspective 3: Community-oriented civil-rights protectors	Italy: 55.6% (45.5%) Czech Republic: 44.4% (23.5%)	Operational: 44.4% Supervisory: 33.3% Top: 22.2%
Perspective 4: Resource-driven independents	Italy: 37.5% (54.5%) Macedonia: 31.3% (45.5%) Belgium: 25.0% (50%) Netherlands: 6.2% (6.3%)	Operational: 25.0% Supervisory: 31.3% Top: 43.7%
Perspective 5: State crime-fighters	Macedonia: 80.0% (36.4%) Czech Republic: 20.0% (5.9%)	Operational: 40.0% Supervisory: 20.0% Top: 40.4%

* Percentages in parentheses: percentage of sorts loading on this factor in the number of sorts per country with loading on only one factor (i.e., excluding cross-loading sorts)

The fact that each perspective contained participants from at least two countries further indicates a considerable overlap of professional outlooks across groups in our sample. For instance, British and half of the Belgian officers shared perspective 2 (hands-on enforcers), while Dutch and the majority of Czech officers shared perspective 1 (professional service-providers). Perspective 4 (resource-driven independents) represented views of Italian and Czech officers. Only perspective 5 (state crime-fighters) was represented nearly exclusively by Macedonian officers. This again supports our earlier observation that, while differences in professional outlooks exist, professional perspectives also possess considerable similarities and overlaps across groups.

4. Discussion

Our study on perspectives on the police profession started out as an explorative investigation with the aim to clarify the diversity of professional perspectives in an international context. Our investigation in a highly diverse sample across six European countries identified five perspectives. These five perspectives emphasized different aspects of police work confirming that the founding beliefs of ‘what it means to be a police officer’ may vary considerably (e.g., Paoline, 2003, 2004). At the same time these perspectives shared a considerable number of features; a smaller number of which were perceived similarly across all perspectives and a larger number that indicate areas of overlap between two or three views. These similarities indicate common points of reference across different profile groups and thus a basis for common interpretations and shared understandings of police work (e.g., the importance of being hands-on or a low relevance of material resources). In contrast, the differences in important features indicate areas in which disagreements or even conflicts may be expected, for instance, with respect to the position of citizens versus the state or the importance of protecting versus enforcing.

The perspectives show overlaps with previously defined officer types. Our professional service-providers share attributes of the ‘old-pros’ described in Paoline (2004) in terms of the positive attitudes towards citizens, while our state crime-fighters share the crime-fighting ethos of his ‘law-enforcer’ and Brown’s (1981) ‘clean-beat crime-fighters’. Our resource-driven independents, in contrast, emerged as a new perspective, not covered in previous studies. These similarities provide validation of our five perspectives. Still, the observed differences are little surprising, as our investigation also included new, inductively developed aspects such as officer personalities, norms, internal relationships and the relevance of resources and tools.

Our study extends discussions about police culture in two important aspects. Firstly, our study is unique in that it considers police culture in an international context. Past discussions of professional perspectives tended to stop either at organizational boundaries (e.g., Ingram et al., 2013; Paoline, 2003; Tait, 2011) or, if the environment was considered, tended to focus on one country (e.g., Sobol, 2010). Our study provides a view on police perspectives in an international arena, suggesting a complex interplay of the socio-political contexts in which police work takes place and the outlook on the police profession. Our findings thus emphasize that the context of police work deserves a broader and more systematic consideration to inform our understanding of professional perspectives in police organizations.

Our second contribution is to advance a feature-based approach to describe professional outlooks. In contrast to dimensional approaches, a feature-based approach can detail not only where outlooks differ but also their similarities in a systematic way. This observation is important, as the considerable overlaps in features suggests that descriptions of police culture should focus more strongly also on the shared aspects of occupational perspectives. Interestingly, some country groups showed a relatively homogeneous understanding, while others were more heterogeneous in their descriptions of police culture. This further suggests that a more differentiated perspective on contextual influences on the ‘sharedness’ of police culture is needed. A feature-based approach, as used in this paper, can serve as the basis for such a more systematic investigation and understanding of officers’ attitudes and their impact on specific behaviors.

To a certain extent, our feature-based approach also reconciles current debates in the field of police culture – suggesting that there is a commonly shared police culture *as well as* profiles

that can be distinguished. In consequence, future considerations of police culture should analyze occupational culture as mixed patterns of commonly shared and context-specific aspects.

4.1 Practical relevance

Increasingly police forces have to operate across organizational and national boundaries. Joint investigation teams, collaborations in Euroregions or concerted efforts against cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism are just some examples. Such collaborations require a common understanding of goals, methods and more generally agreements on the appropriate ‘style’ of police work, requiring the development of diverse professional models instead of relying on national, mono-cultural ones (e.g., Virta, 2013). The practice shows that collaborations are often marked by frictions about priorities, the distribution of resources or conflicts in practices. Our study offers empirically derived, detailed descriptions of the disparities and overlaps in views about police work and practices. Our findings thus help police forces to increase awareness of why collaborations across organizations or countries may be difficult at times, offering pointers for measures to forestall misunderstandings and conflicts.

Our study gains relevance also in the context of organizational changes. Political, economic and social pressures require constant adaptations of police organizations. Yet, not all of these changes are readily welcomed (Das et al., 2007). Davis and Thomas (2003), for instance, provide a striking example of how a prevailing perspective of ‘competitive masculinity’ caused dissatisfaction during the initial introduction of community policing in the UK. Similarly, Jacobs and colleagues (2008) illustrated that the introduction of a ‘management culture’ in Germany led to perceptions that “this is no longer my police”. To understand, which changes may lead to resistance – or which may be happily embraced – a clear view on how police officers view their

profession is needed (cp. Horton et al., 2014; Jacobs et al., 2013; Skogan, 2008). Our study provides a basis for such an understanding within an international arena.

4.2 Limitations and pointers for further research

Of course our study also has a number of limitations. This starts with the characteristics of the sample. In our sample, country emerged as the most relevant demographic difference across perspectives. Still, we cannot (and do not) claim that our results are representative for ‘all officers in a country’. Other aspects such as type of police (e.g. national, local or military), the social, economic or historical framings of society or more personal factors such as specialization within the police can be contextual factors further influencing occupational perspectives. These are aspects that cannot be systematically differentiated in our study. Still, the fact that some countries are represented by one factor, while others are distributed across multiple factors is certainly intriguing, as it suggests that some police forces may be more homogeneous in their professional outlook than others. Subsequent studies should thus investigate the question of why some groups may possess a very clear profile and some a more heterogeneous profile and how these differences emerge.

Our study represents a ‘snap-shot’ of views at one point in time. This leaves room for questions about the stability of professional perspectives. People bring certain perspectives with them into the police profession and are then further socialized during their professional training and work (e.g., van Maanen, 1975). Professional perspectives are thus likely to shift over the course of a career. Repeating feature-based analyses over time or in different situations can provide a clearer understanding of short- and long-term changes. The ability to investigate such

shifts over time and across contexts is in our eyes a further benefit of feature-based compared to dimensional approaches.

In addition, our study provides intriguing starting points for subsequent investigations. This includes questions such as: What exactly creates the differences in professional perspectives among police officers? What are the consequences of these differences for inter-organizational, national or international collaborations? And what do the differences mean for the acceptance of specific change projects and implementation strategies? Clearly, investigating professional perspectives is not merely an academic exercise, but has high practical relevance for police forces and management. We believe there is still much to learn about police professional perspectives in an international arena and hope that our study may provide a useful framework for further investigations in this important field.

Endnote:

¹ The difference in countries between step 1 and step 2 is based on methodological reasons. The Q-sorts were in fact conducted in ten countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and UK. We found, however, that in France, Germany, Romania and Spain a small number of items had been used with a slightly different translation than intended in the original statement set. Such differences create problems with the comparability of items across countries, as they in fact create slightly different items sets. We therefore decided to include only the six remaining countries into our analysis to guarantee that interpretations were based on a standardized statement set.

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