POL

Introductory training Dialogue Police Approach

Key outcomes

The nature of protests has evolved significantly in recent years. Online communication and social media have made it easier for groups to organise and mobilise. This has led to a rise in spontaneous protests, often involving individuals who may not have previously been involved in such activities. But the rise of this online dimension also changes the way in which narratives spread; framing tactics can be used by action groups to gain support and legitimise their actions and simultaneously delegitimise the actions of institutions and police. These developments present a complex challenge for law enforcement agencies. On the one hand, police have the duty to facilitate the right of peaceful assembly. On the other hand, they have a duty to maintain public order and safety, which can be threatened by violent — or extremist — actors in these same movements.

To addresses these challenges, the RAN Police and law enforcement Working Group (POL) organised a training on the theory and practice of the Swedish model of dialogue policing, for police officers from all over Europe. This is a model based on social identity theory, from where conflict reducing principles and special police tactics are distinguished. The premise of the training was that the approach can mitigate the risk of radicalisation within protest movements. The participants were officers with experience and expertise in policing (political) manifestations and/or extremism and radicalisation.

The key elements in the training were the following:

1. Investing in knowledge on specific groups and choosing tactics based on these insights lowers the risk for disorder and violence to occur (and thus the need to resort to repressive use of force) during (political) manifestations, while safeguarding the democratic right of assembly.

2. Working on a better relationship (and trust) between certain groups and police is a (psychological) tool for maintaining public order — which could also (positively) influence the perception towards and legitimacy of the police and their actions.

3. The dialogue approach can be a useful instrument for police to engage with (possibly violent) protesters, but it doesn't replace other existing tactics, including more repressive ones. It is a new, extra tool in the toolbox for police to police demonstrations.

Highlights of the training

The aim of this approach is to enable the exercise of the democratic right of (peaceful) assembly, while reducing or preventing the occurrence of violence during these demonstrations and further radicalisation of the protesters. The Dialogue Police Approach has been used by the Swedish police for more than two decades and is based on scientific insights on group dynamics and behaviour, such as the social identity theory, rather than the outdated concept of the "psychology of the masses", where the group of protesters was mainly seen as a homogeneous group. This approach also emphasises the importance of acquiring knowledge about different (political/social) movements and groups.

The Dialogue Police Approach in Sweden is grounded in social-psychological theory, mainly social identity theory. This theory suggests that an individual's cognitive attachment (or sense of belonging) to a certain group affects their self-concept and (constructed) social identity, which in turn influences their feelings and actions. A group can broadly be defined as any "group of individuals who think of themselves as a group." According to this theory, a group needs to constantly affirm its value and distinctiveness to its members, which it does by comparing and contrasting itself with other groups. These other groups are called out-groups, while the group that one identifies with is called the in-group. The in-group cohesion is enhanced when there is a perceived threat from other (out-) groups. In conflict situations, group identities become more salient and prejudices against other groups become more pronounced. In this way, also a (perceived) threat could result in more extremist views, and result in the radicalisation of individuals in (protest) movements [1,2].

The elaborated social identity model (ESIM) applies the understanding of group dynamics from the social identity theory to the context of policing large-scale events. Key insights reveal that group-shared norms heavily influence behaviour and participation. Similar to groups, crowds possess the ability to shift collective norms, consequently impacting collective behaviour. A catalyst for this change arises from the perceived behaviour and attitudes of other groups, potentially reinforcing or strengthening in-group identities when facing perceived external threats. In this context, law enforcement itself can be viewed as a group, potentially harbouring perceived negative or hostile relationships with certain other in-groups. To effectively comprehend and predict group behaviours during large-scale events, it becomes crucial to delve into these underlying dynamics that shape their actions. For law enforcement professionals to engage more successfully with various movements, acquiring information about these groups becomes important. This encompasses understanding their (leadership) structures, ideological motivations/worldviews, alignments/rivalries and self-perception. Ideally, such knowledge is obtained through dialogue with group members and their (informal) leaders. By gaining an insider's perspective on how these groups perceive themselves, law enforcement agencies can identify key individuals and subgroups, strategically plan operations and tailor their engagement strategies based on these insights. This approach allows for a more nuanced and informed interaction with different movements during large events [3].

[1] Berger, J. M. (2017). Extremist construction of identity: How escalating demands for legitimacy shape and define in-group and out-group dynamics. *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, 8*(7). http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2017.1.07
[2] Strindberg, A. (2020). *Social identity theory and the study of terrorism and violent extremism*. Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut. https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5062--SE
[3] Ibid.

European Commission

Strategy and tactics based on ESIM

The police's actions must not be based on the assumption that the entire crowd/group poses a risk

Interventions must be directed at individuals, adapted to the actions of individuals

Correctly chosen police tactics can reduce and de-escalate conflicts

Uniformity in police methods

Relationship between police and groups is a psychological tool for maintaining public order

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Screenshot of slide taken from training material

The ESIM insights led to the identification of four main conflict reducing principles, to be used for the planning of operations and in engaging with protest groups ([4,5,6]).

1. **Knowledge:** Understanding the identity, motives and goals of demonstrators, but also about our own stance. This involves exploring the legal framework concerning policing these events and the use of special tactics to address specific groups, in order to minimise the risk of disorder or violence to occur.

2. **Communication:** Using the previously gained knowledge about groups or key figures to initiate dialogue — not only during events, but also before and afterwards. Also acknowledging that communication isn't only verbal and face to face, but considering factors like attire choice (e.g. riot gear or regular police uniform) as it impacts how groups perceive police presence.

3. **Facilitation:** Facilitating the right to protest and safeguarding citizens' fundamental freedoms and rights within the rules of law.

4. **Differentiation:** Recognising and distinguishing between various types of protesters. Understanding that while some may be inclined towards violence, others are not. Police actions should be tailored based on individuals and their behaviours.

The four main goals of these special tactics are: 1) safety both for public and police/law enforcement; 2) protecting democratic rights; 3) increased prosecution; and 4) the police must improve their understanding of society and political movements.

During the training participants engaged in discussions with their colleagues. Participants shared their approaches and discussed the possibility of applying the Swedish model in their respective countries. In the discussions it became clear that some countries already have approaches like the Swedish Dialogue Police, while for some other

([4]) GODIAC project (Field Study Handbook): *Good practice for dialogue and communication as strategic principles for policing political manifestations in Europe.* https://ispc.gencat.cat/en/recerca/projectes-europeus/page-00001/godiac/index.html
([5]) Reicher, S., Stott, C., Cronin, P., & Adang, O. (2004). An integrated approach to crowd psychology and public order policing. *Policing: An International Journal, 27*(4), 558-572. https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510410566271
([6]) Reicher, S., Stott, C., Drury, J., Adang, O., Cronin, P., & Livingstone, A. (2007). Knowledge-based public order policing: Principles and practice. *Policing, 1*(4), 403-415. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pam067

countries it was totally new. Whether it can be applied in other countries depends on the police culture, and to what extent there is a perceived necessity to add the approach to the (existing) local approaches.

Participants discussed the following challenges:

- **Reluctance of certain groups to engage in dialogue with police:** Certain groups, like Extinction Rebellion (XR), might show reluctance to engage with law enforcement. In this case, non-verbal forms of communication, such as attire or behaviour, become crucial in establishing trust. The scale and nature of police presence and the actions also communicate to the protesters. Additionally, law enforcement could explore other methods such as online interaction to gather information or establish contact with members.

- **Spontaneous/fragmented protests:** Like with environmental and anti-government protests, demonstrations sometimes lack clear organisation or visible leadership. But even in such seemingly leaderless movements, informal leaders can be distinguished. Identifying and understanding these informal leaders becomes more important in engaging and potentially influencing the trajectory of such protests.

- **Understanding "the other":** There might be some hesitation or reluctance in engaging with certain groups to "understand" their motivations or worldview. It's crucial to note that understanding isn't the same as agreeing with or accommodating their beliefs.

- **Intelligence sharing challenges:** In some countries, intelligence on certain groups might not be extensively shared among different agencies or with first-line officers. This information gap poses challenges, potentially hindering proactive and effective engagement strategies.

- **Missed opportunities because of suboptimal internal coordination:** The actions of dialogue police and other units need to be coordinated and even integrated. The same applies for information sharing between dialogue police and other units.

- **Costs/benefits of the Dialogue Police Approach:** The Dialogue Police Approach might demand extra time and resources. However, over time their implementation can reduce costs associated with damages, legal actions and societal consequences. This approach can also have social benefits, fostering better community relationships. A Dialogue Police Approach can contribute to less violent confrontations with protesters, with a positive effect on the public image of police. This makes the work of riot policing more attractive.

- **Demands on police officers:** The effective implementation of the Dialogue Police Approach requires substantial effort and commitment from all police officers involved in engaging with these groups. It demands a high level of understanding, patience and adaptability in their interactions. All police officers need adequate training to effectively make use of available intelligence.

Expression of gratitude

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Further reading

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