

# On the Biannual International Conference Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe: Concerns and Opportunities for International Police and Policing Research<sup>1</sup>

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Policing and security in the 21st century are not simple extensions of 20th century assumptions, programs and institutions. Rather, the 21st century continues to witness significant global change, producing the widespread displacement of people across the world, significantly increasing inequality, calling for social justice. The police of the 20th century were largely an extension of 19th century thought and practice, enhanced with modern organizations and technology. Nonetheless, challenges to institutional authority, collapsing social and communications space, and demands for equitable policing, now ascendant in the 21st century, require the reformulation of public safety, broadly cast, including the police and security apparatus. This paper considers some of the challenges confronting modern policing as well as opportunities for change. Of particular importance is how research institutes, like the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security at the University of Maribor, which support police and security agencies, can refocus their research lens to better accommodate processes that connect police and security interventions to their outcomes, some intended and others not. Central to this consideration is the need to introduce qualitative process linkages between what is implemented to address crime and security problems, by whom, and with what effect. Research institutes can lead this agenda, thereby assisting police and security agencies as they grapple with 21st century wicked problems.

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## 1 Introduction

Good afternoon. It is gratifying to see so many participants in this Biannual Conference, given the sweep of history across the world over the last two years. Your presence here today attests to the resilience of criminology and police studies, so I commend all of you on your work to improve policing and security.

This celebration of yet another biannual achievement for Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe, being firmly rooted in the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security at the University of Maribor, spans twenty-five years, an amazing accomplishment, and a significant contribution

to scholarship and practice in the police and security communities of Eastern and Central Europe. Numerous research reports, conference proceedings, executive sessions, and other support for the police in this region add depth and character to the role universities can play in building the future of policing in the 21st century and beyond. Moreover, at this time in world history, especially in the face of disinformation and fake news, universities play a vital role in providing science-based information to those who maintain domestic and international stability.

I had the opportunity of visiting Ljubljana several years ago, and in helping to prepare a voluminous set of conference proceedings for broader distribution. I must say the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security at the University of Maribor, under the leadership of Dean Andrej Sotlar and the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security led by Gorazd Meško, are quite impressive, as are its students and graduates. My time in Ljubljana highlighted a committed, engaged and diverse faculty, energetic students and colleagues, with a broader intellectual and policy approach to understanding the region and its justice and security needs. This is a model for many parts

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of the world, building on three interdependent elements to improve policing, security and public safety in this region.

First, such efforts need an honest broker (Rantala, Sarkki, & Karjalainen, 2017), that is, an entity, which has the trust and support of a large and diverse police and security apparatus, spanning 15 counties (by some account up to 18) with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, legal, and governance structures. This complexity encompasses an estimated 180 million people, several currencies, religions and cultural anchors. As a result, focusing on criminal justice and security across such diversity is a formidable undertaking, needing care and especially trust (Meško & Tankebe, 2014).

Second, and related, is the idea that the ability to be a trusted broker of information about criminal justice and security needs predication by having a systematic, longstanding relationship (Alpert, Rojek, & Hansen, 2013). Partnerships develop over time-- they are not instant creations. They must be cultivated, nurtured and sustained. Quick fixes to justice and security never work. We have all seen fads come and go. Moreover, the aim of science, to seek causality, is juxtaposed against criminal justice agency needs for immediate contingency assessments (Blomberg, Mestre, & Mann, 2013). When partnerships fail, practitioners get tired of the often-abstract academic dance, and academics get tired of watching their research collect dust on shelves somewhere in a government complex. Under such circumstances, professional/academic marriages seem headed for separation and divorce, sometimes acrimoniously. Not so with this academic program. The Institute of Criminal Justice and Security, first as a research unit within the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, and for the last 17 years as a standing research unit, represents a longstanding marriage with, of course, some bumps in the relationship, yet it remains connected to the communities of practice in powerful ways.

Third, academic and agency time scales differ, thereby requiring coordination. Good academic research takes time, down and dirty results get you just that, down and dirty findings. At the same time, the watches of agencies, pressed for action and results, need coordination with the calendars of the research community, two divergent measures of time. The longstanding efforts of the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security need a resounding applause from all of us in attendance today.

Celebration is always an important part of nurturing complex relations. It grounds us, provides shared meaning, and creates future opportunities. It is the mother of imagination, and as Albert Einstein once told us, "Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."

The Institute of Criminal Justice and Security has C. Wright Mills' (1959) "Sociological Imagination," the ability to understand complex social relationships and their contextual anchors, asking informed, yet sensitive, questions reaching beyond the problems *de jour*, toward larger socio-legal groupings and institutions. Research institutes that sustain such a focus are clearly of public and policy value (Diez, 2000).

Having extolled the virtues of research institutes for policing and security, there remain concerns and opportunities yet explored. In some ways, these concerns call for systematically adjusting the research frameworks currently in vogue. While some of these changes may be difficult, remember they are opportunities as well.

## 2 Some Concerns

The 21st century is much different from its predecessors (Riegl & Landovsky, 2013). It is not a continuation of the past. It is neither linear nor incremental. In many ways, history has been broken and is searching for its' place in the world again. The world order is fluid and in flux. Past social, political and economic orders, largely established following two world wars in the early 20th century, have given way to tectonic shifts in geopolitics producing widespread global Diasporas, cultural earthquakes, the ravages of pandemic disease, and formidable changes in our Mother Earth's climate. Social media has replaced shared agreement on facts, interpretations, goals and values (Aral, 2021).

In addition and of paramount importance here is recognition that inequality has further fractured social bonds, subjugating large populations across the globe, not just those in developing countries. Today, social, economic and cultural inequalities permeate the globe; their reach is broad, and their effect dehumanizing.

At the same time, what we think we know about criminal justice, the police and security are also in flux (The Police Foundation, 2020). Law and criminal justice are challenged in light of such inequalities, especially those impacting individuals' sense of safety, security and of justice. The utilitarian ends of the justice system now increasingly fall under normative rebuke for the means by which they are achieved. Of course, justice is about means and ends.

The police and those in security roles face public mandates and scrutiny to be effective, yet fair and accountable. Authority as we have come to understand now uprooted in many places. This directly affects those in justice and security roles.

In my view, the 21st century has become a breaking point in how we understand communal, social and political life. How research adjusts to these challenges is a pressing question. There is no putting the egg back into the broken shell.

The later half of the 20th century and into the 21st has been dominated by research questions about police and security effectiveness and efficiency. Today, in addition to these utilitarian concerns, are a multitude of voices focused on issues of social and community cohesion, while understanding the latent and manifest impacts of justice and security policy and decisions. While several scholars have focused on these latter justice-focused concerns, much of what funds criminal justice research is centered on 'what works', rather than on 'what works, for whom and with what consequences'? In light of increasing inequality awareness, it is incumbent for criminal justice and security research to be clear about the values underlying policy. Blind adherence to efficiency is a suboptimal approach, ignoring the value premises that undergird law and justice considerations.

Moreover, acceptance of the law and its agents of social control requires a reimagining and reformulation of justice and security institutions (Klingege, Scott, & Walter, 2010). As a result, research institutes such as the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security must be beacons for the future, not codifiers of the present, or guardians of the past.

Remember, Professor Einstein also told us, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." The world is rapidly changing; science must adapt to these changing conditions as must governments and their agents of social control, police and security professionals.

Given the current break point in global affairs, Einstein tells us "The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion". Built on much different assumptions, the past has yielded to the present, with overlapping and divergent assumptions. The future on the other hand is looking for another path altogether. Doing the same things, as in the past, is unlikely to work in a new world order.

Accommodating such change of necessity requires expanded conceptual and theoretical approaches to the study of criminal justice and security. Also required is the integration of multiple methods to broaden understanding of the connections between actions and results, positive and negative. Experimental methods can give us some understanding of 'what works', but it is not often able to tell us why. More simply put, justice and security research will need to expand theoretically and methodologically if it is to address emergent questions (Greene, 2019), especially those involving inequality.

This is a serious challenge, and an opportunity. This is not solely a challenge for universities. Today, governments fall under increasing pressure to rethink their missions and methods. Absent institutional change, criminal justice and security research will do more of the same, likely with the same disappointing results. 19th century institutions, with some tinkering in the 20th century are insufficient to 21st century problems. Government and private funders must adapt to a changing world. Most research institutes work at the behest of some external agency. An almost single-minded focus on achieving efficiencies, with some impact, ignores the externalities influencing crime, security and justice. Change is center stage. The question remains, are justice institutions and university research institutes leading or following that change?

The Institute of Criminal Justice and Security has for many years focused on rural life and social control in rural communities. Given demographic dispersion across Central and Eastern Europe, such distinction is warranted and of value, of course.

However, macro level shifts in geopolitics, mass migration, heightened social tensions and wariness, are widely cast, across rural and urban venues. At times urban environments transmit or transport concerns to rural communities, who are nevertheless also concerned with a changing social and physical landscape.

Moreover, in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe the police find themselves organized nationally, yet deployed locally, further compounding assumptions about law, order, security and justice. Centralized policy in the face of distributed action needs attention. Of course, the police invariably act locally, where assigned. Still, national police and security policy must be cognizant of local dynamics. This is a ripe area for future research.

### 3 Some Opportunities

Many opportunities present themselves, given the shifting landscape of criminal justice and security across the world. I will take up four briefly here. They have some overlap, yet are distinct enough warranting brief consideration.

#### 3.1 Open the Aperture – Increase Exposure Time

In photography, increasing light in your photo can be accomplished in two ways, selecting a larger aperture opening or a longer exposure time. Criminal justice and security need to do both.

Opening the aperture allows more information (light) into the frame. Such light includes a better understanding of many qualitative aspects of life effecting law and order, including how people live and find themselves in need of criminal justice and security interventions, how those interventions are received, and how those interventions are framed and implemented by justice and security system practitioners. Each of these questions needs more light, likely requiring serious qualitative input into the policy making and evaluation process.

Increasing the exposure time has the same effect, staying with agencies and communities as they try to sort what are “wicked problems”, that is, problems with many geneses, theoretical understandings, interpretations and impacts” (Weber & Khadenian, 2008). Dealing with crime and security is not a simple undertaking. Individuals, small groups, communities, formal institutions and global forces all shape crime, social order and justice problems and solutions. Of importance here, is the needs for longitudinal research on communities and their interactions with the police (Zane, 2020). Moreover, if we are to really understand the craft of policing, then longitudinal research needs to capture the development and maturation of police officers over time in the 21st century (see for example, Rosenbaum, Schuck, & Cordner, 2011).

Over many years, the aperture of crime and justice research has narrowed, squeezing out the light and shortening the exposure time. Secondary data analysis and powerful analytics have ascended as the “gold standard” in police and security research. While these approaches are interesting and informative, they have narrowed the research frame on such matters, sometimes because agency data are available and relatively inexpensive to exploit. These approaches are necessary but not sufficient. Our social lives are indeed patterned, but understanding what such patterns mean to individuals, communities and police and security professions, is another matter altogether. Opening the aperture and increasing exposure can greatly assist in understanding those meanings.

Opening the aperture and lengthening exposure times can also refer to greater understanding of the construction of justice agency data. For the police, official data are a mixture of whether people call the police for assistance (Black, 1980), and whether the police choose to validate complaints by accepting them. As a result, police nest what we use as data for assessing policing in decisions made by citizens and responses to those decisions, each with subtle interpretations.

Moreover, by most accounts, police work is craftwork, interpersonal work between a police officer and a community member. Such interactions use legal and administrative law to

address often vague and ill-defined social problems. As such, opening the aperture and exposure time on the qualitative dimensions of policing, is essential, given that policing today, qualitatively, is much different from the past.

### **3.2 Integrate Urban and Rural Justice and Security where They Overlap**

This concern likely raises some objections. Of course, research on crime, security and justice in rural communities is important and a worthy pursuit. At the same time, shrinking global social space also requires that we see the similarities and differences across rural, exurban, suburban and urban populations (Noack & Federwisch, 2018).

Social media in all its manifestations has shrunk social space (Aral, 2021). An industry of disinformation permeates daily life, shaping worldviews, tolerances and actions. From mega-city streets to rural pathways, social media’s reach is omnipresent. As a result, some of the distinctions between rural, exurban, suburban, and urban, have narrowed. Understanding the congruence of attitudes and perspectives across population groupings, which were heretofore quite distinct, is a major need in criminal justice and security research. This is especially the case for national police systems, where policies and practices span these domains.

Moreover, it is a false premise that innovation comes from urban areas then travels to rural areas. Innovation is bi-directional. Urban areas can learn much from their rural counterparts. Keeping them separate in a consolidating world ignores present-day and future realities.

### **3.3 Build Awareness of the Role of Justice and Security in Assisting Social Cohesion and Reducing Inequality**

Over many years research on social control, policing and security has highlighted the role that justice functionaries might play in assisting community cohesion (Zahnaw, Corcoran, Kimpton, & Wickes, 2021). For many criminologists, increasing social cohesion, a bottom up approach, can lead to improved social order, as well as perceptions of justice (Bellair, 2017; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Schuilenberg, van Steden, & Breuil, 2014). More often than not, these approaches are sidelined in favor of top down approaches to crime, security and justice, missing the central point – the genesis and solutions to crime and justice need to include those who are the targets of such interventions. Public safety like environmentalism must think globally, yet act locally. While the medical model is frequently invoked in police re-

search, it would be rare that medicine would introduce a treatment without understanding and conferring with the patient.

### 3.4 Research for a Future Set of Criminal Justice and Security Conditions, Not the Present

Returning to an earlier assertion, the past is no longer prologue. 19th century institutions will not stand the pressures of 21st century problems. The roles and functions of justice and security systems are increasingly strained. A security-minded world demands more of its institutions of internal and external control. Shifting national allegiances, competition across borders for scarce resources, the clash of ideologies, and massive inequalities, press governments for relief and social justice. Universities can help map emerging relationships, conflicts, and program impacts, but not without reframing criminal justice and security in the modern era.

Cross border cooperation, increased social tolerance, and sustainable partnerships between and among those providing justice and security services, and those in need, will require broader considerations of what motivates social and security conflict, and what mediates these forces.

The emergent picture today is not the 19th century silo government framework, but rather collaborative frameworks where leadership for problem-solving may not always be centered in police and security agencies. Under many circumstances, leadership may devolved to community agents, or those in other helping disciplines. This is not a matter of defunding the police, but rather of refunding public safety. Such changes invariably create fiscal problems, as many of these eternal agencies and community actors remain underfunded or not funded at all by governments.

This is a thorny problem, yet in the 21st century, simply increasing police and security budgets is unlikely to address such complex problems. Redistributing government resources for maximal impact is a major yet essential undertaking. Public safety funding resides in the question, “What public safety actions are impactful, fair, accountable and dynamic, how are they produced, and by whom?”

Simply put, improved social cohesion, and the lessening of crime, and security breaches, within and across borders, is too important to reside in agencies with narrowly defined, singular functions. Emergent models of collaboration coupled with broader university contributions embracing many forms of knowledge are essential for a 21st century response.

Here the question shifts to the central mission of government. Are current definitions of police and security agencies,

largely emphasizing crime control and constrained security, appropriate? Alternatively, can grouping an array of community, private and governmental responses under ideas associated with public safety, an umbrella construct, provide a framework for greater interagency, public/private and community collaboration. This is likely the frontier of criminal justice and security practice and research in the 21st century.

## 4 In Closing

Today is a day of celebration of the Institute and for the continuation of a trajectory of high-quality research on matters of crime and security. All present at this Biannual Conference, have an important role to play in broadening this line of inquiry. What is essential going forward is the need to balance crime and security outcomes with doing justice. To do otherwise further closes the aperture, and shortens exposure time letting in little useful light, thereby making for a dismal picture. Adjusting the aperture and increasing exposure time, can let considerably more light into these discussions, reframing the image of 21st century policing and security, to the benefit of all. What an opportunity.

Thank you.

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## **O bienalni mednarodni konferenci Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe: Pomisleki in priložnosti za mednarodno raziskovanje policije in policijske dejavnosti**

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Policijska dejavnost in varnost v 21. stoletju nista preprosto nadaljevanje predpostavk, programov in institucij 20. stoletja. Nasprotno, 21. stoletje je še naprej priča pomembnim globalnim spremembam, ki povzročajo obsežno razseljevanje ljudi po vsem svetu, znatno povečujejo neenakost in pozivajo k socialni pravičnosti. Policija 20. stoletja je v veliki meri predstavljala nadaljevanje miselnosti in prakse 19. stoletja, okrepljena z modernimi organizacijami in tehnologijo. Kljub temu izzivi institucionalni avtoriteti, propadajoč družbeni in komunikacijski prostor ter zahteve po pravičnem policijskem delovanju naraščajo v 21. stoletju in zahtevajo preoblikovanje javne varnosti ter varnosti v širšem pomenu, vključujoč policijo in celoten varnostni aparat. Ta prispevek obravnava nekatere izzive, s katerimi se sooča sodobna policijska dejavnost, kot tudi priložnosti za spremembe. Posebej pomembno je, kako lahko raziskovalni inštituti, kot je Inštitut za varstvoslovje Univerze v Mariboru, ki podpirajo policijo in varnostne agencije, ponovno osredotočijo svoje raziskovanje na procese, ki povezujejo policijo in varnostne intervencije z njihovimi načrtovanimi in nenačrtovanimi izidi. Osrednja točka tega premisleka je potreba po uvedbi kvalitativnih procesnih povezav med tem, kar se izvaja za reševanje problemov kriminalitete in varnosti ter kdo in s kakšnim učinkom izvaja tovrstno dejavnost. Raziskovalni inštituti lahko vodijo to agendo in tako pomagajo policijskim in varnostnim agencijam, pri njihovem spopadanju s problemi 21. stoletja.

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