

Magdalena Dobrowolska-Opala

Institute of Political Sciences, University of Warsaw, Poland

Diagnosing Police Activities Using Qualitative Research Methods

Abstract

The article presents the possibilities of implementing qualitative research for analysis activities taken by the Polish Police, especially in the aspect of the formation activities in the field of internal security of the state. In addition to the proposals of a three-way perception of the Police in terms of the subject of the research and description of the specifics of the qualitative research, the reader was invited to include a qualitative methodology for analysis of police problems. The article ends with a brief description of the qualitative study implemented for the purposes of the doctoral dissertation on the role of the police in the field of ensuring security for football matches.

Keywords: shooting training, firearms, training system in the Police, Police

Creating the English-language version of the journal "Securitologia" is financed under contract No. 724/P-DUN/2018 from the funds allocated by the Minister of Science and Higher Education for dissemination of science.



Introduction

The police and its activity, regardless of the context in which it is embedded, is an research subject not only in the ever-emerging security sciences but also wider – in social sciences, including political sciences. Polish Police, historically and nowadays, closely related to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in a direct way enters the scientific issues defined in the internal security, defined in the aspect of people security protection and maintaining security and public order (Ustawa o Policji z dnia 6 kwietnia 1990 r., art. 1 point 1).

With reference to historical and contemporary interest in research into police in general, and the Polish Police in particular, the research goal of the article is an analysis of basic possibilities of diagnosing Police activities using qualitative research methods. The main research questions relate to the explanation dependencies between selected areas of police issues and the opportunity to study them using selected quality methods. The key are, therefore, answers to questions about which police issues are recommended for the research on qualitative approaches and about methods and techniques that will be particularly useful in such research.

The specifics of qualitative research

Qualitative research in terms of their implementation in practice are distinguished by features that they show wider trends recorded in social sciences. Security studies as part of this larger collection also benefit from the output of researchers referring to the methodology used in qualitative research. Following the guidelines developed by Graham Gibbs (2011) – a researcher dealing with using computer software to implement and interpret results qualitative research - you can try to combine them with sample themes research in the field of internal security and police issues.

In the publication *Analyzing qualitative data*, he points to seven points characteristic for the methods of conducting qualitative research. The first of these is striving to capture the subject of the research in its natural context, mainly due to attempts to understand, describe experiences and interactions not separated from the respondent and his / her environment (natural, professional, family) in which he / she functions. The next two points refer to the preliminary preparation of the study outline.

While the quantitative methods allow, and often even require, precise definition of the subject of the research at the very beginning, it is in qualitative research that its scope often evolves towards developing or refining the aspects that were initially considered impossible to investigate or insufficiently selected. This approach combines with flexibility in the selection of methods and theories that are determined in terms of the subject of the study.

The fourth feature mentioned by Gibbs focuses on the element that distinguishes most strongly between quantitative and qualitative approaches, i.e. the researcher's involvement in the research process. In a sense, thanks to the active inclusion in the observation, free conversation, structured interview, etc., the researcher identifies himself with the subject of the research and tries to penetrate deeper into the analyzed topic. Directing on the situational context and analysis of cases as the factors explaining the considered issues is the content of the fifth point of the list. The sixth relates to the techniques of elaborating collected materials and results, reducing them mainly to the descriptive layer - study descriptions, interview transcripts, etc. and the interpretation layer, and finally the presentation of the results. The seventh, the last point of research methods according to Graham Gibbs draws attention to the quality of research results, which should be reflected in the proper adjustment of the study, and even only its specific parts, to the methods and techniques used (Gibbs 2011, pp. 13-14).

Summing up Gibbs' proposal, one should take into account the non-exhaustive nature of the points he has proposed. Qualitative research has a much wider spectrum, including tools supporting the process of coding descriptive content or approaches aimed at analyzing the content of documents, valued higher than the numerical representation of data and the determination of universal trends based on them. In addition, the locality of qualitative research, understood in relation to the subject as well as the selection of respondents, is a feature that directs many researchers to discover topics close to smaller communities, where results cannot be generalized to a state or global perspective. It is difficult in qualitative studies to sketch out broader trends or to set trends characteristic for large social groups. It is easier, however, to get to know the subject deeply and expand it with the perspective of individual perception, which influences, *inter alia*, the continued interest in this type of research among sociologists and psychologists. Potential fields of application, however, appear more and more often among political scientists, in management sciences or, more broadly, in social sciences.

Possibilities of including quality methodology into police issues

Issues related to security and the role of the police in this area were analyzed within the science of politics and legal sciences for many years, but currently they have their own separate space in security sciences – this relatively young scientific discipline, present in Polish science since 2011, has been still working on its methodological workshop, drawing from the rich sources offered by other, more established disciplines. Considerations on the usefulness of qualitative research for the analysis of issues related to the police, therefore, have their base in the pursuit of deepening the methodological workshop and the possibility of interpretation of materials from the area of internal security and state bodies involved in its provision.

Choosing the police as a research subject opens wide possibilities, which in a simplified way, are down to a choice between three main paths.

The first of them, which seems the most popular, comes down to the analysis of issues in which police forces play a key or at least significant role. Both Polish and foreign scientific literature abounds in related studies on organized crime, home abuse, traffic security, mass events protection or public order. In the enumerated, exemplary areas of understanding the role of the police and its impact on combating or preventing specific phenomena there is an basic element, without which it would be difficult to recognize an academic article or a study as a comprehensive topic. Not taking into account the police perspective may distort the reality, which is becoming increasingly important in the era of progressive security privatisation, gradually obliterating, clear in previous centuries, separation between security guaranteed by state entities, and given as a commodity on the services market. Within scientific interests, the characteristics for the first path, the works combining security science with other scientific disciplines, focusing on forces responsible for state security (internal and / or external) or analysis of phenomena related to sociology, anthropology, psychology and even philosophy can be considered as perspective.

The second path of perception of the police in terms of the subject of research should be interpreted in terms of an indirect solution, more precisely defining – an element related to security and public order. The position of the police in this way does not determine research, but it requires a fragmented consideration of the activity of this formation. Analyzes covering the issues of coordination or cooperation in the area

of security are the best example of the usefulness of this approach. The police do not have a monopoly in the area of caring for security to a lesser extent, and for public order in a larger scale. The system of related vessels, more and more often taking the form of a network of dependencies and connections, gives the subject matter of police significance, forcing it to take into account its perspective and inclusion in the research. In the path cited, the researcher will not focus on the description of police activities, making at least a partial attempt to understand police involvement and role, which this formation meets.

The last, third path transfers the burden of scientific interest from the analysis of phenomena connected with the internal security of the state to the Police understood in a strictly objective way, i.e. in terms of a uniformed and armed formation serving the public (Ustawa o Policji z dnia 6 kwietnia 1990 r., Article 1 paragraph 1). In this approach it is not so much in what areas of social life the policemen are involved, but how. The police functions (also how it worked in the past) under specific of social, political, organizational, conditions etc. In the scope of the position understood in this way, there are, among others, reflections on police education, the state of the formation staff, the official pragmatics of the officers, the role of the Chief Police Commander and provincial commanders. This most narrow research path is the domain of police schools, which proves the importance of this type of education, including its academic variety. Academic centers dealing with the issues of internal security as well as researchers focused on the field of comparative research analysis, both relating to police forces in the past, as well as today.

The aforementioned paths enable full use of methods within them and techniques assigned to qualitative research. Obviously, referring to qualitative research in the context of police and internal security issues does not exclude the use of a second type of research, i.e. a quantitative variety. In order to distinguish qualitative and quantitative research, one should first of all look at reference points that define the researcher's approach.

In the first case, the role of the researcher is significant, somehow dominated by the previously adopted perspective and fields of interest adapted to it. A direct contact of the researcher with the subjects is very important, the reference levels are attempts to describe, understand and possibly determine the motives of individuals or their small groups. In quantitative studies, the influence of the researcher on the source data is

limited to a minimum, the choice of measurement methods and statistical methods is more relevant to the analysis than the information obtained. Direct correlations are replaced by their indirect description, and the ability to reproduce and compare studies is incomparably greater. Therefore, the prognostic aspect has permanent fixation, reinforcement by carefully developed research methods and techniques.

The relationship between qualitative and quantitative research is interesting in comparison to the preparation and testing of research hypotheses, or essences of scientific research. Qualitative research is conducive to the generation of research hypotheses, which results from their focus on establishing and understanding the motives of individuals' behavior, collectivity, etc. Quantitative research, in turn, supports the testing of hypotheses, which takes place mainly due to the normalized development of results and reference to previously known statistical relationships. Repeatability of the test sequences helps to compare the results and refer them to data collected at different time intervals and by different researchers. The basic differences include the perception of the subject's position – in qualitative analyzes, greater freedom of the participant's expression is allowed, thus supporting his or her creativity and increasing the sense of control over the transmitted content. In contrast, a quantitative variety is presented, which does not require a lot of emotional involvement in the subject, focusing on gathering the desired, precisely defined information (Tarka 2017, pp. 19-23).

The presented difference is clearly visible in more important methods of research assigned to both types of tests. For example, characteristic for quantitative surveys questionnaire surveys allow you to study a large group of respondents in a short time span and to comprehensively efficient gathering and preparation of acquired materials. This effect is achieved, among others thanks to logically and precisely formulated, unresolved questions.

The shortage of the survey is on what the so-called qualitative interview concentrates, where there are more possibilities to stimulate the motivation of the respondents in terms of correctness and diligence in answering questions (Apanowicz 2002, p. 87). In a qualitative interview, direct conversation is used, which is not always the case in a questionnaire survey, and a provision to ensure favorable conditions evoking a positive and honest motivation for respondents (*Ibidem*, p. 85).

The questions themselves are more complicated than in the surveys, moreover greater cooperation and knowledge is expected from the respondent on topics that arise

during the conversation. Conducting individual quality interviews on a large group of respondents takes a lot of time. Increased effort from the researcher requires not only implementation of conversations, but also their correct encoding, which allows further analysis of many pages written on the basis of previously made recordings. Information obtained thanks to the interview is not assigned universal features, it is difficult to base them on representative positions or views specific to larger groups of people. On the micro scale, however, the advantages turn out to be more visible – interviews allow for a deeper understanding and richer justification of the analysis of topics embedded in a narrowly focused subject of research or in a defined group of respondents.

In order to precisely determine the research topics that favor application qualitative research is worth first to refer to the distinction between method and research technique. Comparing the two concepts to the fore, the level of their generality stands out – the method is a general one and consists of techniques that precisely define how to examine a given slice of reality. Research methods help in the interpretation, inference and development of acquired materials, information. Techniques, on the other hand, refer to the process of collecting and obtaining of data.

Examples of methods include their comparative and systemic varieties, content analysis or historical analysis.

Techniques, in turn, can be divided into empirical and theoretical ones. To the first from these, various types of interviews are included (in-depth, structured, individual), and for the second analysis of documents, development of indicators, etc. (Pawluszko 2013, p. 8). When considering the usefulness of qualitative research in the area of analysis of police forces, their tasks and roles, it is worth referring to several methods and techniques that may be useful.

One of the methods of qualitative research, sometimes also treated as a technique, is observation. As Jerzy Apanowicz points out, it is one of the oldest methods, broadly widespread not only in social sciences, but also in natural sciences. Observation treats the studied reality quite broadly, trying to find connections or causal relationships between particular elements. At the beginning, it defines the scope of the study (its frame) and determines the initial hypotheses and observation indicators, subsequently verified either during the examination, or after it's finished. From ordinary perception it distinguishes between targeted and planned selection of observed phenomena, people or space (Apanowicz 2002, pp. 62-63).

Earl Babbie in the publication *Fundamentals of social research* proves that field research, to which is the observation included, are the most desirable when it is considered important to learn about attitudes and behaviors that can be best understood in their natural surroundings. Just like the situation with social processes happening in time – the subjects to observed in their origin and evolution, and not rely solely on later reconstructions (Babbie 2008, p. 322).

The observation method can thus be used to analyze the police patrol service during mass gatherings and events, changes in the behavior of the residents of the housing estate in the public space in the presence of their district police officer or adopting attitudes by high school students in response to police visits to the school.

In general, the ways people behave in public space are particularly favorable area for field research. Wide access to them, combined with freedom of action does not force to undertake additional projects that require penetration into the structure of the studied group or obtain permission for observation.

However, the work is complicated by the need, particularly close to the issues of security assurance, following the study object to places not necessarily accessible to the public or engaging in situations that are dangerous to the observer. In such cases, consent is necessary and very often difficult to obtain. As a formation working in the area of public safety and order, the police must carefully approach the admission of outsiders to observe the work of officers and its broader description in the literature on the subject. The confidentiality of some data requires leaving certain spheres of functioning of the Police not researched by outsiders, deprived of authorization of the provincial (Capital) Police, or even Chief Police Commander.

Another method useful in the field of police force research is a case study. Its assumptions boil down to the analysis of one or several examples of a given phenomenon, a separate event or person (its image, behavior, etc.). As an inductive method, the case study is based on the gradual gathering of information, so that after gathering and interpreting it will lead to the formation of a preliminary generalization that confronted with the literature of the subject and similar research lead to the closure of the study and full generalization of its result. The use of the method may take two basic forms: a descriptive description explanations of a given situation, events, etc. or, in a broader context, a larger part a process to support well-grounded theories or support those just emerging Developers (Babbie 2008, p. 334).

The discussed method, as a rule, focuses on atypical situations, cases that require an individual and extended approach. Useful the techniques here are interviews, content analysis and observation. It depends on the researcher in a large one measure how widely it will treat the analyzed case and whether it will try to place it in a broader context. If he decides on the simplest version he will achieve it the results permitting support or denial of a previously prepared thesis, which is very often an example for a wider phenomenon or an observed tendency. Under the scope of research analyzed in this chapter, individual police actions or operational or organizational projects combined with the use of the comparative method can be included in the case study. It allows to combine several views in the context of similar threat challenges to security, the course of actions or people involved in it. The description of the impact of legislative changes on the selected area will be the of subject police activity, for example international cooperation within one EU undertaking (a police police contingent or an individual delegate for training to the European Union Agency for Training in the Field of Prosecution – CEPOL).

The final proposition of using qualitative research is the technique widely used in social sciences, i.e. in-depth individual interview. The formula of the interview boils down to a conversation focused on achieving a specific one by the researcher of the goal. Depending on the choice of the interview subtype, interview with the respondent it is unconstrained, oriented or free-standardized (when a list of wanted information has been designated before the interview). The choice of the interview results mainly from the stage of scientific work – to ave initial discernment it will be directed on a poorly focused interview, for more advanced works it more standardized interview shall be better (Mider 2017, pp. 127 and 128).

With regard to research in the field of police problems, structured interview will be the most desirable, mainly due to its expert character and restrictions on access to some information (confidentiality of data available to officers). Questions selected according to the official position of a given officer and taking into account the space unavailable to the researcher help to collect information and facilitate subsequent analysis - at the interview, officers may be afraid of expanding some of them or even refusing to take them. Usually, the police commanders, in the area where the research is taking place, expect to submit a set of questions to be asked to police officers. Thanks to the fact that the questions contained in the structured interview are usually asked in a particular

order, they allow the respondent to gradually enter the issues, striving for more and more precise answers.

In-depth individual interview in the version with a standardized list of information gives the interviewee autonomy, so that he has the sense of influence and the important role he plays in the research process on the one hand. On the other hand, it helps the researcher to encode the collected data, which results from the fact that each respondent faces similar blocks of issues in the same order. So in transcripts it is much easier for you to find yourself than it is in case of uninhibited, non-targeted interviews, which, however, have their drawbacks - limiting to previously defined questions can inhibit spontaneous conversation and limit the interlocutor's invention.

An example of the inclusion of a qualitative methodology into the study of the fragment of Polish police activity, is the study, which the author of this article carried out for the purposes of the doctoral dissertation entitled *The role of the police in ensuring the safety of football matches in terms of the network*. The above-mentioned study was carried out in the form of a qualitative interview based on a structured interview, i.e. in the area of organizing the issues and form of preparation of talks. The content of the particular questions corresponded with thematic blocks, which in turn had a direct connection with the adopted research perspective – the network paradigm of state security (Aleksandrowicz 2014).

While studying the involvement of the Polish Police in ensuring the safety of football matches, the network approach was used to connect individual actors of different provenance active in the field of match safety. The police, recognized as a leading actor, were combined with other entities and analyzed in terms of the relationships they made with them - whether through legal regulations or through organizational involvement - most often resulting from activities of a preventive nature.

In order to reconstruct links, it was decided to have interviews in which the questions directly referred to the most extensive relationships, i.e. between the Police and the organizer, including members of the order and information service, local authority, mayor / mayor / president of the city, voivode and supporters. In the context of individual levels, reference was also made to the activities of the formation itself, asking, inter alia, for training of officers, international cooperation or spotters' institution – a kind of regional supporters. Finally, the talks were conducted with the representatives of

all sixteen voivodeship police headquarters and the Warsaw Metropolitan Police Headquarters.

Due to the full representation, it was possible to develop applications on a national scale, which does not happen very often in qualitative research. What's more, we managed to partially collect information specific to district (municipal, city) police headquarters – the staffs of voivodship headquarters receive collective information from the entire province. A detailed description of the study and conclusions drawn based on it can be found in (Dobrowolska-Opala 2018).

Ending

Qualitative research methods thanks to the extended range of techniques and sets of methodological assumptions favor their use in research on police forces and, more broadly, those relating to internal and external security. The attitude towards local aspects on the one hand, and on the other, a look at the individual perception of selected topics is conducive to discovering phenomena and trends that can escape the researcher focusing only on the use of quantitative research.

According to the spirit of the latest research, one should look more broadly and, in some cases, combine qualitative and quantitative research. The first of these treated, as a kind of “clearing the foreground” for making hypotheses, then to verify them in detail using quantitative research or using qualitative research to explain the results obtained through quantitative research (Nicpoń, Marzęcki 2010).

The article focuses on the analysis of basic methodological assumptions for: observation, case study and in-depth individual interview. The results of these considerations can be reduced to the conclusion that in each of the three proposed ways of police investigation (police activity as the key subject of the study; police activity as part of tasks carried out in the area of public safety and order; concentration on the police and its structures) it is possible, or even highly recommended, to use quality methods. In this especially those indicated in the text – they constitute a well-tested and well-developed deposit for several generations of researchers.

References

- Aleksandrowicz T.R. (2014), *Świat w sieci. Państwa, społeczeństwa, ludzie. W poszukiwaniu nowego paradygmatu bezpieczeństwa narodowego*, Warszawa, Difin
- Apanowicz J. (2002), *Metodologia ogólna*, Gdynia, Wydawnictwo Diecezji Pelplińskiej „BERNARDINUM”
- Babbie E. (2008), *Podstawy badań społecznych*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN
- Dobrowolska-Opala M. (2018), *Rola Policji w zapewnianiu bezpieczeństwa meczów piłki nożnej w ujęciu sieciowym*, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek
- Gibbs G. (2012), *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN
- Mider D. (2017), *Polacy wobec przemocy politycznej Studium typów postaw i ocen moralnych*, Warszawa, Elipsa Dom Wydawniczy
- Nicpoń M., Marzęcki R. (2010), *Pogłębiony wywiad indywidualny w badaniach politologicznych*, [w:] Mikucka-Wójtowicz D. (red.), *Przeszłość - teraźniejszość - przyszłość: problemy badawcze młodych politologów*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Libron
- Pawłuszko T. (2013), *Wstęp do metodologii badań politologicznych. Skrypt akademicki*, Częstochowa, Polskie Towarzystwo Geopolityczne
- Tarka P. (2017), *Specyfika i komplementarność badań ilościowych i jakościowych*, „Wiadomości Statystyczne” nr 3 (670)
- Ustawa o Policji z dnia 6 kwietnia 1990 r., Dz.U. 1990 nr 30 poz. 179