

The Dynamics of Policy Formation

Till Tore

Örebro Studies in Political Science 36



MONIKA PERSSON

**The Dynamics of Policy Formation
Making Sense of Public Unsafety**

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Title: The Dynamics of Policy Formation. Making Sense of Public Unsafty

Publisher: Örebro University 2014
www.oru.se/publikationer-avhandlingar

Print: Örebro University, Repro 08/ 2014

ISSN 1650-1632
ISBN 978-91-7529-037-9

Abstract

Monika Persson (2014): The Dynamics of Policy Formation – Making Sense of Public Unsafety. Örebro Studies in Political Science 36

Every policy problem has inherent value dimensions. It is on the basis of values that a state of affairs is perceived as undesirable, and thus acknowledged as a problem. This makes the process of defining and negotiating the meaning of a problem an essentially political process. Despite this, bureaucracy and expertise have a strong, if not increasing, influence over the formation of policy problems. An objectivist knowledge view predominates within the public managerial realm, which obscures the political dimension of problem formulation, while policy problems tend to be approached as a matter of efficiency.

This thesis provides an account of mechanisms that shape and constrain the way a particular policy problem is understood and addressed. It analyses how policy actors make sense of particular problems, by drawing on different discourses (scientific, institutional, popular or media). The empirical case of this thesis is the formation of public safety policy in Sweden. The understanding of the problem of unsafety within Swedish policy is shown to be intrinsically related to the research field of fear of crime. The two are mutually dependent and exert an ideational path dependency. The ideational constraints on the understanding of unsafety are further affected by the institutional setting. It is argued that the appointed institutions and the emphasis on local level have a part in fostering individualist explanations and solutions, while obviating structural interpretations of the problem.

The thesis finds that when governing complex policy problems there is a need to pay closer attention to how the problem is defined and how its meaning is constrained. It is crucial to make transparent the values inherent in definitions of problems as well as in research claims. By acknowledging the entwinement of policy and research the policy formation process may become characterized by greater reflexivity, and the possibility of resolving wicked problems may enlarge.

Keywords: Policy formation, wicked problems, sensemaking, safety, unsafety, fear of crime, policy change, discourse, ideas, interpretive, policy transfer

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Förord

Mycket har hänt sedan jag påbörjade arbete med denna avhandling. Inte enbart vad gäller den begreppsliga användningen av trygghet inom politik och policy, eller med de institutioner och personer som jag studerat och mött. Under denna tid har jag också introducerats till och lärt känna den akademiska världen. Det har varit en lärorik, stimulerande och utmanande tid, som jag är mycket tacksam över. Jag vill nu ta tillfället i akt och tacka de personer som på ett eller annat sätt bidragit till denna avhandling och till min forskarutbildning i stort.

Jag vill börja med att tacka mina handledare. Jan Olsson tog över rodet som huvudhandledare och har spridit entusiasm i alla lägen av detta projekt. Tack för dina konstruktiva kommentarer på mina texter och för att du när det behövts fått mig att tänka och skriva ett steg längre. Ditt positiva engagemang har varit mycket värdefullt. Tack även till Erik Amnå som var huvudhandledare under den första tiden och som introducerade mig till praktiken. Erik Amnå har även bidragit med viktiga kommentarer i slutskedet av avhandlingsarbetet.

Mötet med den akademiska världen hade inte ha varit detsamma om det inte varit för min biträdande handledare Rolf Lidskog. Rolf är inte bara en konstruktiv och noggrann handledare, utan är även en god kollega, förebild, och vän. Jag är tacksam för att du handgripligen introducerat mig till den akademiska världen, till att skiva papper, och att presentera på konferens. Inte minst uppskattar jag att du alltid tar dig tid och alltid har ett gott och ärligt råd. Det har varit en stor glädje att ha dig som handledare och kollega.

Jag vill även tacka ämnesgruppen i statskunskapen genom dessa år. Inte minst vill jag tacka er som vid olika tillfällen bidragit till min avhandling genom att läsa och kommentera mina texter. Tack till Ann-Catrin Andersson, Renée Andersson, Cecilia Arensmeier, Agneta Blom, Viktor Dahl, Ingemar Erlander, Charlotte Fridolfsson, Martin Karlsson och Stig Montin. Jag vill särskilt tacka Erik Hysing för din alltid noggranna läsning av mina texter och för stimulerande och initierade diskussioner. Din kritiska ådra tillsammans med ditt engagemang för dina kollegor är en ovärderlig kombination. Jag vill även tacka Mats Lindberg som involverade och introducerade mig i undervisningen, och som inspirerat mig både pedagogiskt och intellektuellt.

Under ett par år av min doktorandtid hade jag glädjen att sitta i den då samlade forskningsmiljön Cures. Tack till er alla som bidragit till en sådan öppen, positiv och energigivande miljö, vilken varit till stor betydelse för mig.

Tobias Johansson har fått den utmanande uppgiften att läsa och relatera till diverse ofärdiga texter, vilket bland annat resulterat i att jag introducerats till forskare inom organisationsteori, vilka har varit av betydelse för mitt arbete. Tack för dina tips och ditt stöd. Tomas Bergström, Lunds universitet, har bidragit till denna avhandling genom konstruktiva och välriktade kommentarer i rollen som slutseminarieopponent. Jag vill även framhålla betydelsen av de kommentarer som jag fått på de fyra pappren av flertalet anonyma kommentatorer, samt redaktörer. Dessa kommentarer har bidragit till att förbättra de fyra pappren.

Mina respondenter förtjänar ett stort tack för sin medverkan. Tack för att ni tagit er tid och berättat för mig om er praktik, eller besvarat min enkät. Utan ert bidrag hade denna avhandling inte kunnat skrivas. Jag vill även tacka för inbjuden av Tryggare och Männskligare Göteborg och forskningsnätverket Trygg och säker stad, att komma till Göteborg och presentera min forskning. Det var ett mycket givande seminarium och mängden engagerade praktiker gav mig det energitillskott som jag då behövde. Jag vill framförallt tacka Borghild Håkansson, Ylva Mühlenbock och Ingrid Sahlin.

Denna avhandling har finansierats av Örebro Kommun, via deras satsning på forskarskolan Offentlig verksamhet i utveckling, vilket jag är mycket tacksam för. Jag vill även tacka Marcus Johansson och Örebro Polisen, som initierat och finansierat den enkätundersökning som jag gjort, vilken ligger till grund för studien i artikel IV. Tack för ett trevligt samarbete.

Thank you Irvine Lapsley for inviting Tobias and I to Edinburgh University as guest researchers, and for taking such good care of us while we were there. Your openness and friendliness is admirable. Irvine also contributed with insightful comments on my work at the New Public Seminar 2013. Thanks also to Vesselina, Delfina and Elisa. It was a pleasure meeting you.

Jag vill även tacka Per Axelsson för foto och Anneli Persson för korrekturläsning. Tack för er hjälpsamhet.

Till sist vill jag tacka min och Tobias familj som alltid ställer upp och är en glädje att träffa. Tobias och Tore, tack för att ni finns och gjort dessa år till de bästa i mitt liv.

Örebro, sommar 2014

Monika Persson

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PART II

PAPER I

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PAPER IV

Persson, Monika (2013). The relative importance of institutional trust in countering feelings of unsafety in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 20(1), 73–95.

¹ The authors contributed equally to the paper.

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PART I

1. Introduction

One of the most central aspects of politics is the contestation about how reality should be interpreted. At global, national and local levels there are constant struggles, not only over which issues are the most crucial but also about the essence of the social problems that are on the political agenda. Controversies may concern whether a phenomenon should be considered a problem, and if so, what the major factors causing the problem are. Disagreement may also involve the magnitude of ‘the problem’ and the proper solutions to it. Embedded in the understanding of a social problem, or rather, social phenomenon, are assumptions about reality: about relationships, behaviours, incentives, identities and so forth.

The definition of a policy problem can be described as ‘the discrepancy between the state of affairs as it is and the state as it *ought to be*’ (Rittel & Webber 1973: 165, authors’ italicization, cf. Smith 1988). Hence, values constitute the very foundation or essence of a problem. Values guide what ought to be and thereby constitute the discrepancy with what is perceived to be. The formation of policy is in this sense inherently political (cf. Fischer 2003, Stone 1997). Policy problems are not given, objective facts that are waiting to be discovered and solved. They are socially constructed conceptions arising through the interpretation of reality. As interpretations and constructs, they are constantly being re-represented, reproduced and potentially reformulated.

A policy problem appears when attention is directed towards a particular phenomenon that is considered to depart from the desired state of affairs. What problems we see depends on where our attention is directed (cf. Jacobs 2009), and how it is framed (Lidskog *et al.* 2010). Our attention may be redirected through contextual changes, which may lead us to ‘discover’ or formulate new problems. A recent example is the European banking crisis, which has triggered debates concerning the relationship between the state and the market, and their respective responsibilities. A policy problem may be strategically formulated and framed by policy actors (Stone 1997), but it may also be ‘discovered’ through the implementation of a policy (Kingdon 2003, Christensen *et al.* 2005), or through the enumeration of the social world (Stone 1997, Lee 2007), that is to say, when aspects of the social world are measured and those numbers come to be interpreted and relativized. Within environmental policy, for instance, the means of measuring biodiversity, air pollution or the environmental impact of particular energy resources shapes our understanding of envi-

ronmental problems by directing attention to particular aspects of the phenomenon (see Lidskog 2014).

Policy problems related to the social world are by their very nature complex and intractable, often described as wicked problems (see Rittel & Webber 1973, Schön & Rein 1994, Stone 1997). Characteristic of wicked problems is that they may not be exhaustively defined. Constituting but one expression of the social world, they are inseparable from other problems. A problem of the social world, such as crime, can always be considered a symptom of another ‘higher-level’ problem, be it relative deprivation or the breakdown of social control. The location of the core of the problem is highly dependent on the worldview of the analyst (Rittel & Webber 1973: 165–166). Defining and measuring a problem at one particular level therefore always entails a reduction of complexity and an exclusion of aspects of the phenomenon. Every attempt to alter the problem has repercussions that may change its conditions. A wicked problem is therefore essentially unique and contextual. Thus, it is more accurate to talk about governing wicked problems than about solving them.

Policy studies have historically been dominated by an aspiration to make policy more ‘rational’ and aligned with scientific findings, and to make public policy less dependent on politics (Stone 1997: 6). However, the quest to find scientific solutions to social problems has not fulfilled its promises (Rittel & Webber 1973, Fischer 2003). Researchers increasingly recognize that social science and policymaking are inherently related; they are both involved in forming, negotiating and establishing the categories, boundaries and interpretations that give meaning to the social world. Together they provide the frames through which problems are identified and made sense of (see, e.g., Latour 1987, Stone 1997, Fischer 2003).

However, the rationalistic project still has a strong position within the academia. What is more, an objectivist knowledge view dominates within many public institutions and constitutes the foundation of most public organizations, which influence the way policy problems are perceived, as well as how they are governed. An expression of the objectivist influence on the policy practice is the spread of, and reliance on, what is often referred to as evidence-based solutions, a logic that embodies the objectivist epistemological assumptions (Webb 2001). Another expression of the objectivistic influence is the dominance of management by objectives within public organizations, which builds on a separation between value-based politics and value-neutral expertise.

I will argue in this thesis that the objectivist influence on public institutions is particularly limiting concerning the governing of wicked problems, as it tends to support a narrow view of knowledge (cf. Petersén & Olsson 2014) and obstructs explicit deliberation over values. Newer authorities that are set up to govern contemporary wicked problems, such as sustainable development, public health, public safety or disaster resilience, generally have a coordinative function (cf. Montin 2007). The primary aim of such coordination is directed and collective learning. Knowledge production and dissemination is commonly used in place of traditional steering mechanisms (Rothstein 2005: 15, Montin 2007). Networks, partnerships and interorganizational cooperation are arranging principles, putting these institutions at arm's length from the traditional political accountability structure (Montin 2007). This form of governing brings the relationship between power and knowledge in the fore. The fact that knowledge is both a means and an end for such policy institutions gives them a legitimating chimera of objectivity, though they to a larger extent have taken over both the problem-defining assignment and the expert and opinion-making role (Rothstein 2005, see also Fischer 2003: 15). Meanwhile, the political debate seems to have become less explicitly ideological and rhetorically more technical.

This thesis rests upon four papers that explore the case of public safety policy. The questions and conceptual discussions of this thesis are thus informed and shaped by the insights from these studies. Public safety has received increasing attention in many countries since the new millennium and there has been extensive policy development and transfer (Van Swaaningen 2005, Crawford 2009a, Gilling *et al.* 2013). New institutional arrangements have emerged, and in the following chapter I will illustrate the intrinsic relationship between policy development and the production of knowledge. When analysing how meaning is ascribed to the problem of unsafety, I show how the interplay of global ideas, dominant discourses, research findings and contextual factors continuously form the meaning of the policy problem. By drawing cues from these sources and combining them, policy actors form causal storylines that make sense of the problem (Weick 1995, Hajer 1995). Policy is more likely to be influential and spread to multiple contexts if its core storylines persuasively relate the problem to contemporary societal trends and combine the problem with causal explanations, giving it a general character (Røvik 2000). Such storylines form the ideational core of a policy that will be referred to as a policy idea-complex.

By analysing the process through which the policy actors strive to make sense of the policy problem, I identify factors and mechanisms that enable and constrain the understanding of the problem. Governing wicked problems has proved to be intrinsically difficult. By learning more about the process of policy formation and the mechanisms that constrain it, we may simultaneously learn more about the prerequisites for governing wicked problems of our time.

1.1 The aim of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the practice of policy formation concerning wicked policy problems. In particular, it explores mechanisms that enable and constrain the way a particular problem is understood and addressed, and how this process is interrelated with knowledge production and use.

The empirical case that the thesis rests upon is public safety policy in Sweden, and in particular, policy formation around the policy problem of (feelings of) unsafety, as it played out in the first decade of the new millennium. (The case is further introduced in the following chapter).

In relation to the aim of the thesis the following questions will be explored and answered:

- How is the understanding of feelings of unsafety as a policy problem shaped and constrained in Sweden?
- What lessons can be drawn for the governing of wicked problems, such as feelings of unsafety?

While each of the papers contributes to a particular theoretical debate, the research questions of the thesis are intended to contribute to a more general discussion about policy formation and the governing of wicked problems.

The thesis also makes a contribution to the policy practice. By revealing the assumptions and presuppositions embedded in the definitions of the problem of feelings of unsafety, the values inherent in the concepts that give it meaning and strength are illuminated. Such an account may help to guide policy choices and make them more transparent (cf. Stone 1997:

11). Though this thesis does not comprise a comprehensive discussion and evaluation of current Swedish research on public safety, it contributes to this debate by discussing more general issues on how the policy problem is framed and policy is shaped, and more particularly, by emphasizing the role of institutional settings in this process.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is based on four papers and is divided into two parts. The first part is foremost a conceptual discussion that introduces, synthesizes and discusses the contribution of the second part, which consists of the four papers. In other words, the first part of the thesis provides a more general theoretical discussion by synthesizing the papers and elaborating on the general lessons to be drawn from this work.

The *first* part comprises six chapters, whereof this introduction is the first. The *second* chapter offers an introduction to the case that this thesis builds upon, namely, public safety policy and the policy problem of feelings of unsafety. This chapter addresses how the policy problem has been ‘invented’. It also addresses the emergence of a policy idea-complex that has travelled transnationally, and thereby spread ideas about ‘the problem’, along with suggested interventions and institutional arrangements. The chapter concludes with the puzzles that have emerged as the transnational idea-complex meets the Swedish context, and that have guided the papers of this thesis.

In the *third* chapter I theoretically elaborate on the policy formation process, and how it is conceptualized in this thesis. I present policy problems as constructs and develop a theoretical understanding of how meaning is ascribed to wicked policy problems in the process of governing them. This chapter serves to reinforce and develop the theoretical contribution of the thesis. It also serves to relate the thesis to different theoretical discussions.

The *fourth* chapter accounts for the methodology and materials applied in this thesis. I classify this thesis as an interpretive research project, and discuss how such a project relates and contributes to more conventional policy research. In this chapter I also introduce the materials that have been used in the empirical studies, and how they relate to and complement each other. The *fifth* chapter offers a summary of each paper and its main contribution. In the *sixth* and last chapter I return to the research ques-

tions of the thesis. This concluding discussion addresses how the understanding of a policy problem may be shaped and constrained by the entwinement of policy and research; available policy ideas and solutions; and local, national and institutional contexts. It also includes a discussion on implications for the governing of wicked problems, where three issues in particular are emphasized. The two first deal with the recursive relationship between institutional arrangements and the understanding of the problem, while the third and last section stresses the need for more reflexivity and transparency concerning knowledge claims within public policy.

2. The problem of public unsafety

In this chapter I will introduce the reader to (feelings of) unsafety as a policy problem. I will start with an account of how I have translated the Swedish words *trygghet* [(feelings of) safety] and *otrygghet* [(feelings of) unsafety], since the transition between the languages is not a matter of pure translation, but implies a shift in meaning which affects the understanding of the phenomenon (cf. Bauman 2000: 214). Writing in English about this phenomenon within a Swedish context has been challenging. When translating into English, there is a risk of losing meaning, as well as of adding connotations that extend the meaning expressed through the Swedish language. However, being attentive to language has also made it apparent that the terms used in English affect the understanding of the problem, which also affects the meaning of the Swedish term, as it is used within the policy discourse. This influence is exerted through knowledge, as well as policy, transfer. In the text I use the word safety as equivalent to a more general usage of the term *trygghet*. However, the term *otrygghet*, as it is used within the Swedish policy debate, emphasises the feelings or experience of being unsafe.²

Within the Swedish context the term *otrygghet* is generally used when referring to ‘fear of crime’. That means that when the fear of crime discourse emerged in Sweden, the term *otrygghet* acquired an extended meaning, as it incorporated meaning from the ‘fear of crime’ concept. As a consequence, its dominant connotation within policy was altered. However, this also means that the understanding of the phenomenon of fear of crime is more easily perceived as associated with other forms of unsafety in Sweden, due to the use of the word *otrygghet* rather than the narrower concept of *rädsla för brott* [fear of crime] (see also paper III).

Within the academic literature it is becoming increasingly common to associate fear of crime with other dimensions of safety. Fear of crime is shown to be greater among those who experience less safety in other respects. One example concerns the degree of social expenditure and de-commodification in a country, which has a negative effect on crime-related

² I do not use the English term ‘insecurity’, which is sometimes used in anglophone literature on this topic, as this word is closer to the Swedish term *osäkerhet*, which has a broader meaning and is more often used as an individual trait, which I believe would be misleading in the present context (cf. Bauman 2000: 214, on the term *sicherheit*).

insecurity, wherefore these policy measures are suggested to neutralize public anxiety more generally (Hummelsheim *et al.* 2011). It has also been shown that socioeconomic vulnerability and other structural inequalities correlate with fear of crime (Hale 1996). Fear of crime has been argued to be a symbolic representation of other more abstract uncertainties in modern life (Hollway & Jefferson 1997, Hughes 1998, Jackson 2004, Lidskog 2006, Elchardus *et al.* 2008, Gadd & Jefferson 2009), such as the individualization expressed, for example, by the trade-off of collective security in exchange for the maximization of individual choice (Bauman 2000), or the extended amount of imperceptible risk due to the scientization as well as globalization of society (Beck 1998).

However, I shall now return to the policy discourse, and the perception of fear of crime and (feelings of) unsafety as a policy problem. Safety is at the heart of the most fundamental policies of modern states. Public safety is generally viewed as the primary motivation for the social contract that provides the bases for legitimate state power (e.g. Hobbes 2004). With the emergence of the welfare state the notion of safety expanded to incorporate the risks related to market mechanisms. Safety policies such as income security, employment security and the universal pension system were central aspects of social democratic policies and their perception of freedom and equality. However, during the last two decades (un)safety has come to be primarily associated with crime prevention and crime risk within Swedish local and national policy debates (Sahlin 2010). In this context, feelings of unsafety are seen as a problem in their own right, argued not only to be a fundamental problem for the quality of life of individuals, but also to undermine the most fundamental aspect for the modern social contracts; the trust in and legitimacy of its institutions.

The understanding of feelings of unsafety as a problem related to crime, but separate from crime risk, has its origin in the 1960s in the United States (Lee 2007; see also paper III). At that time the first large-scale victim surveys were conducted. These surveys were intended to produce a wider picture of 'the crime problem'. As a part of this, questions attempting to measure crime-related fear were formulated (Lee 2007). Several factors interacted to politicize fear of crime at that particular time and place:

the increasing sophistication of statistical inquiry; criminological concern with new forms of crime statistics; the emergence of victim surveys; rising rates of recorded crime in the USA and new attempts to govern this; racialized concerns about 'black rioting'; a particular form of populist political discourse; and a historical moment where the conditions of possibility were such that these seemingly diffuse discourses could converge. (Lee 2001: 480)

In addition, Loo (2009) has shown that the polls gave a faulty representation of the crime concern due to leading questions, as well as selective reporting of the results. As a consequence, the political discourse reproduced a highly inflated image of the concern about crime among the public.

Crime statistics (in this extended form) have influenced research, policy and media, which in their turn influence the perceptions of the public (cf. Lee 2009). Lee (2001) illustratively described a '*fear of crime*' feedback loop which has rendered and enforced fear of crime as a legitimate governmental object of calculation, inquiry and regulation. He argued that:

[R]esearch into victims produces and maintains the criminological concept of 'fear of crime' quantitatively and discursively; that this information operates to identify fear as a legitimate object of governance or governmental regulation; that the techniques of regulation imagine particular types of citizens – *fearing subjects*; that these attempts to govern 'fear of crime' actually inform the citizenry that they are indeed fearful; that this sensitizes the citizenry to 'fear of crime'; that the law and order lobby and populist politicians use this supposed fearing population to justify a tougher approach on crime . . . and in doing so sensitize the citizens to fear once again; and that this spurs more research into 'fear of crime' and so on. (Lee 2001: 480–481: italicization in original)

The understanding of fear of crime or feelings of unsafety as a policy problem is thereby continuously being re-represented and rearticulated by researchers, policy makers and journalists as well as the general public. In this process they are all entwined, though not necessarily equally influential.

Fear of crime provides an example of how enumeration may direct attention to a particular phenomenon and at the same time frame the understanding thereof. As it happened, fear of crime (as it was first measured) was inversely correlated to crime risk. More specifically, older people and women showed higher levels of fear, while they, according to crime statistics, faced a lesser risk of falling victim at the same time, young men in

particular expressed lower levels of fear, while they, according to the statistics, faced higher crime risks. This pattern has shown to be very consistent and has come to be known as the risk–fear paradox [*trygghetsparadoxen*]. It has stimulated extensive research (Hollway & Jefferson 1997: 256), and constitutes a common reference in policy debates (ibid., paper III) as well as a truism among the general public. The lack of correlation between fear and risk (as it was measured) enabled the perception of fear of crime as a phenomenon separate from exposure to crime (Lee 2007).

Ever since the initial operationalization of fear of crime, there has been criticism of how it is measured (see e.g. Hale 1996, Ditton & Farrall 2000, Björkemarken 2007, Sutton & Farrall 2009, paper IV). Despite this, slightly different versions of the question ‘how safe do you or would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night’ (Ditton & Farrall 2000: xix) still dominate, not least within the public administration. In paper III I argue that this path dependency of the operationalization exerts a restriction of the understanding of the problem in policy and upholds crime as the source for unsafety. The paper provides a further illustration of the influence of statistical inquiry, including the risk–fear paradox, on the perception of the policy problem of feelings of unsafety in Sweden.

2.1 The institutional embedding of the problem

As ‘fear of crime’ has become an established policy problem it has become embedded in policy interventions and institutional settings. In paper I we argue that the understanding of unsafety in Swedish policy and the policy interventions applied are in line with a transnational policy trend with provenance in the United States, and with the United Kingdom as an influential example (Newburn 2002, Crawford 2009b). Similar policies have been adopted in the majority of western countries as well as in some developing countries (Gilling 2001; see also Crawford 2009a). It should be noted that the policy transfer does not necessarily imply a convergence in local policy practices (see, e.g., Edwards & Hughes 2005, Crawford 2009a, Gilling *et al.* 2013), nor should it be seen as an exclusively top-down movement of ideas; the cross-national policy transfer is continuously influenced by local policy practices. The changeable nature makes it difficult to pin down the content of the policy trend; however, the ideational core can be summarized in five points (papers I, II; see also Young 1999, Garland 2001, Gilling 2001, Hughes 2002, Crawford 2009b):

- An assumed public concern about increased crime as well as fear of crime;
- Concern about the weakening and fragmenting of traditional bounds of social control as well as interpersonal trust, following the individualization and urbanization of society;
- Emphasis on individual rights at the expense of general public interest, as well as the return of the victim, in which the injured individual is put in the centre, and the offender is not seen as a victim of his/her personal history and social circumstances;
- Concern about the limited capacity of formal criminal justice institutions to reduce crime and come to terms with rising crime levels, and a detachment from the social welfare response to offending, that is, social prevention and the rehabilitative ideal;
- Mobilization of the civil society and an aim to create preventive partnerships between public and private actors to develop prevention strategies and community policing, emphasizing local solutions to local problems.

This idea-complex implies causalities. It is claimed that crime rates are rising and social control and traditional bonds are weakening. As a consequence, people are feeling more unsafe. On the basis of this stated development, formal institutions and welfarist rationales are being questioned (Hughes 2002: 2–3). Crime prevention policies, later incorporated into the broader term community safety policy, have been described as a broadening of crime-combating strategies from retribution to the prevention of the criminal act through situational context adaptation, as well as through social interventions directed at risk groups (Hughes 1998). The shifting attention towards (avoidance of) the opportunities for crime explains the localization of safety policy at local level, as the expressions of crime tend to be local. However, it should be noted that turning local excludes a wide

range of crimes, such as white-collar crime,³ while privileging others, most notably property crime. In terms of broader tendencies, it could also be argued that the cause of preventing crime is taking over as a legitimate reason for social policy, which affects social policy as well as attitudes towards the same. An example of this is social prevention in terms of risk-group interventions.

The policy interventions vary, and there tends to be a blending of the objective to reduce fear of crime and feelings of unsafety, on the one hand, and the objective to reduce crime, on the other. The merging of those two objectives is comprehensible based on the assumption that feelings of unsafety reflect crime risk. As illustrated above, the two problems form part of the same policy storyline. Thus, though my intention in this thesis is to analyse the policy formation around feelings of unsafety, it needs to be understood through its connection to crime policy and discourse. Examples of interventions under the umbrella of public safety policy⁴ are neighbourhood watch schemes; prohibition and removal of graffiti and other 'signs of social disorder'; sport schemes during school holidays; improving street lighting and cutting bushes and shrubbery; information campaigns on crime statistics (not least in attempts to dampen 'disproportional worry'); visible policing; surveillance cameras (CCTV); security measures and partnerships for local businesses. In Sweden a widespread intervention is safety walks [*trygghetsvandringar*]. Paper I offers a further discussion and classification of interventions, while paper II addresses the adaptation of interventions in localities with different contextual characteristics.

There are several institutions at multiple levels involved in public safety policies. At local level different municipal agencies are involved together with the police and other local authorities, but community safety may also engage private businesses, civil organizations and members of the commu-

³ This, of course, depends in part on the constitution of the locality. In the Swedish context there is a difference between Stockholm and Gothenburg. In Stockholm the town is divided into different municipalities, with divergent socioeconomic contexts, and the problem has not been addressed or coordinated at city level. Gothenburg on the other hand is smaller, and the municipality comprises large parts of the city. Public safety issues have had a high priority in Gothenburg, and situating a council under the municipal board has made a broader interpretation of the problem possible and facilitated cooperation among a wide range of local state authorities.

⁴ In the anglophone countries these policies are generally referred to as community safety policy, and the communitarian influence has been strong (Hughes 1998).

nity. At national level several authorities are related to the task; however, in the Swedish context the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) is the focal authority, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has a central role. In addition there are networks at European level (the European Crime Prevention Network) as well as ideational exchange between the responsible agencies in different countries.

A multi-agency approach is at the core of public safety policy (Gilling 1994, Hughes 1998, Gilling *et al.* 2013) and has been a recurring theme in the observations and interviews that are part of the empirical material of this thesis. Hughes (1998: 77) argued that ‘the great political appeal of the call for multi-agency crime prevention lies in its apparent “obviousness” and simple “good sense”.’ At one of the policy conferences that I attended as an observer (see paper III or chapter 4), multi-agency cooperation was even concluded to be the single most important issue for enhancing feelings of safety:

If someone were to ask me what I believe is the absolutely most important thing to be able to build a society that is characterized by greater trust and a feeling of safety, then I’m very glad to be able to say that almost everyone who talked this morning was on the same track. Because what it’s about, is to get rid of the silos. (SALAR 2009)

Though communication and coordination between different agencies is necessarily a good thing, multi-agency cooperation in safety policy has been found to be problematic in several respects. Multi-agency cooperation seems to strengthen the police agenda and compromise the role of other more welfare-oriented agencies, such as social work (Pearson *et al.* 1992). It has also been argued that collaborative projects tend to advantage situational methods, as these appear more knowable, feasible and measurable (Gilling 1994). Another aspect that has been questioned is the seeming decentralization of influence from the central state to a broader set of local actors. It has been argued that these policies represent an extension of indirect state power, through the decentralization of responsibility to the individual level, rather than an extended local influence (Cohen 1985, Hughes 1998, Lee 2007).

2.2 Why the case of public unsafety

The case of public unsafety provides an opportunity to make a threefold contribution to current academic debates, first of all, to the debate concerned with the governing of wicked policy problems. Public unsafety is an issue that receives extensive attention in modern societies, that holds the characteristics of a wicked problem, but that has rarely been analysed as such. Within this debate there is currently an emphasis on environmental policy, wherefore a broader set of cases may be fruitful. The second theoretical contribution is to the research field of public safety (including community safety and local crime prevention), where the theoretical perspectives applied in this thesis have not been much explored, and may thus provide with new insights. The third conceptual discussion that this case may contribute to concerns the role of storylines and discourse in policy formation and change, where the core literature to a large extent builds on environmental policy, and where this case may thereby make fruitful contributions.

The case of public unsafety has been chosen based on its actuality and inherent puzzles, rather than on criteria for drawing the most general empirical conclusions possible (see, e.g., Hague & Harrop 2010: 45, Flyvbjerg 2006: 229–233) (cf. chapter 4, on the methodology of this thesis). As I started working on this thesis in 2008, the policy problem of feelings of unsafety was receiving extensive attention, in particular within local authorities. There were numerous policy conferences on the issue, and civil servants at different levels were reaching out to academia in the effort to make sense of the policy problem. When I started to explore the problem that was receiving all this attention, an ambiguous picture emerged. Paradoxes, abstractions and inconsistencies fuelled the searching character of the policy debates (see further below). Thus, specific features of the case triggered the research process. In the course of exploring this case, its interrelationship with the discourses of other fields and more general trends were revealed, for example, the relationships between policy and research, between understanding of problems and institutional settings and managerial trends, and between the policy discourse of public safety and other contemporary societal discourses. These relationships of a more general character are further explored in this first part of the thesis.

2.2.1 Sweden – a puzzling case

The exploration of the policy formation of public safety policy in Sweden has been guided by three empirical puzzles. The first one is that the prob-

lem represented by the policy idea-complex, that crime and fear of crime are rising, is not well supported empirically for the Swedish case (papers I, II). Since the end of the 1990s, when these policies emerged, a general trend of rising crime is highly contested. When it comes to feelings of unsafety or fear of crime, the trend during the latest years is a decrease (BRÅ 2014),⁵ and trust in public institutions, including the welfare institutions, is stable and relatively strong (Rothstein & Stolle 2003, Svallfors 2006, 2011). Thus, there are inconsistencies in the description of the problem at a policy level. So, why is this policy being implemented, if the description of the problem does not apply in a Swedish context? Is ‘the problem’ (re)constructed? The second puzzle is that the neoliberal heritage of these policies allows for a more individualized framing of the problem than the Swedish social democratic policy legacy would suggest, indicating that the ideological basis of Swedish policy is changing (see paper I; cf. Van Swaaningen 2005). Third, within the academic literature community safety and public safety policies, as well as the conceptualization of fear of crime have received extensive criticism not least based on the UK context (paper IV). However, the call for alternative methods and interpretations has had only limited influence over the administrative criminology in leading authorities such as the UK Home Office, where the early, narrow conceptualizations of fear of crime are predominant (cf. Lee & Farrall 2009: 212). Meanwhile, the Home Office still seems to have ideational influence within the UK, as well as in Sweden, on policy formation (paper III). How might we understand the mediating mechanisms that affect what knowledge comes to influence the formation of safety policy?

These puzzles have triggered the research process (see Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012, for the role of puzzles in the research process) and guided me towards establishing a better understanding of the mechanisms that shape the meaning of a policy, and thereby affect how the problem is governed.

⁵ The Swedish Crime Survey shows that the proportion of respondents who felt unsafe when they go out alone in their own neighbourhood late at night has decreased, from 21 per cent in 2006 to 15 per cent in 2013. Between those years the proportion of respondents anxious about criminality in general decreased from 29 per cent to 19 per cent, and the proportion of the respondents who were anxious about their loved ones falling victim to crime decreased from 32 per cent to 24 per cent (BRÅ 2014).

3. Policy formation and the sensemaking process

This chapter contains a theoretical discussion concerning the process of policy formation. By drawing on different strands of research I develop a theoretical understanding of the formation of policy problems that takes place as they are governed. The chapter is organized in four parts. I start by accounting for my definition of policy formation and position the process that I aim to study in relation to relevant theories. In the second part, policy problems are presented as social constructs. It is emphasized that wicked policy problems cannot be objectively and exhaustively defined. It is argued that a definition of a problem is always based on interpretations that can be problematized and questioned. In the third section the formation of policy is conceptualized as a continuous formation of the meaning of that problem, a process based on sensemaking (Weick 1995). Lastly, I identify contemporary trends in the institutional arrangements for governing wicked problems, and the central role of knowledge in such institutions is critically assessed.

The theoretical account that I present in this chapter builds on insights from the case studies presented in the papers. It should thereby be seen as a further exploration of those studies, rather than as a theoretical framework to be applied and tested in the papers, as the conventional format suggests.

3.1 Defining policy formation

Policy formation can be understood literally as the genesis of a policy, the process through which it takes its shape. Policy formation is generally studied at a relatively abstracted level, as the formation of the policy agenda, rather than as a close account of the formation of one particular policy. Two of the more prominent theories that address policy formation in such a perspective are Kingdon's multiple streams approach and Baumgartner and Jones's punctuated equilibrium theory (PET). Kingdon (2003) explained which policies enter the political agenda, by analysing the interplay between different factors (actors, ideas, institutions and external processes). He perceived the policy arena as characterized by complexity and unpredictability and as being in a stage of constant (potential) change. The policy formation is shaped by the flow of three streams: problems, policies and politics. When these streams coincide, there is an opportunity for policy to form or change. In particular, new policy issues may arrive on

the agenda when a window of opportunity opens, such as the emergence of a new policy problem, changing contextual (e.g. economic) conditions or a change in political power. Policy actors may then push a policy onto the political agenda by bringing together the three streams.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) were interested in stability and change on the policy agenda. They investigated the interplay between the same factors as Kingdon (actors, ideas, institutions and external processes), though focusing on how the interaction between these factors creates stability, on the one hand, and periods of turbulence and change, on the other. Their main aim was to explain why disequilibrium occurs at a particular time. They identified a circle of interaction between policy actors, the media and public opinion, which feed into each other. When a new idea takes hold the issue expands and spreads through this interactive process (cf. Lee's description of a '*fear of crime*' feedback loop, introduced in the previous chapter).

These influential theories may be informative for how the policy problem of feelings of unsafety arrived on the political agenda. However, for the purpose of my analysis they have limitations. First of all, their main focus is on agenda setting (see also Fitzgerald & Jones 1981), while they neglect the implementation process that follows (John 2012). The perception of the policy process as a set of distinct stages, where policy is formulated, rationally decided upon and then implemented, has been widely challenged. Consider, for example, the point made by the implementation researchers during the 1980s, that policy is shaped also during implementation (see, e.g., Hill 2007). Agenda setting and implementation are now generally seen to be interrelated, which makes policy formation a continuous process. In this thesis the focus is not on agenda setting, but on the governing of a policy problem and the continuous policy formation within that process.

Second, and this relates foremost to PET, they tend to take established policy subsystems (such as agriculture or urban policy) as their unit of analysis (as does the Advocacy Coalition Framework). What I wish to explore is the policy formation process of a policy problem at the crossroads of different policy subsystems (social work, policing, urban policy) and institutional levels (national, municipal, transnational). The conditions for policy formation are likely to differ in cases of multi-agency network governance, a proposition that I will return to. The theoretical contribution of this thesis could thus be seen as complementary to the agenda-setting theories.

The aspect of policy formation that will be investigated in this thesis is a more restricted process, and at the same time a more fundamental process, as my focus lies on the constitution of meaning. It is more restricted in the sense that the main focus is on the governing process of a particular problem on the agenda and within the bureaucracy. Within this setting, policy formation takes the form of a constant process of grasping the problem: initiate learning, draw on (available) research, negotiate what to do and make sense of the problem in relation to a particular context.

I use the concept policy formation, and not the rather similar concept of policy formulation (Sidney 2007), to make explicit the insights from discourse theory, crucial to my analyses. There are three propositions in particular that are central to my argumentation. First, policy formation intentionally paraphrases discursive formation, which is a structure of meaning, resulting from the articulation of different discourses⁶ into a relatively unified whole (Torfing 1999: 300). I perceive the essence of policy formation as the formation of meaning (cf. Bacchi 2008), and thus, the process of policy formation to be constrained by the way meaning is structured. In the policy formation process actors may articulate new meaning by drawing on and combining other discourses or frames (further elaborated below). Second, I wish to uphold that the formation of the meaning of a policy problem (which includes the responses to it) is a performative act. The formation of a policy is more than a specification for policy implementation. It is a formation of meaning, which is not only dependent on but also shapes categories and identities and thereby action (I return to the constitutive aspect of policy formation in section 3.2.1). Third, and as a consequence, policy formation (i.e. the constant formation of the meaning of a policy problem) should be understood as a mechanism of power. Howarth put it this way: ‘Every discursive formation . . . involves the exercise of power, as well as certain forms of exclusion, and this means that every discursive structure is uneven and hierarchal’ (Howarth 2010:

⁶ I use the term discourse more formally to signify a set of ideas, concepts and categories that provide a meaning system that is (re)produced and transformed to give meaning to social and physical relations, phenomena and events. These systems of meaning form identities of subjects as well as objects, but are also constantly rearticulated and potentially changed by actions (including speech acts). While discourses operate at a macro level, by transmitting values and beliefs, there are also subordinate discourses that structure a specific realm, such as the social scientific community, a policy field or a particular institution (Hajer 1995: 44, Fischer & Gottweis 2012b: 10–12; cf. Howarth 2007: 10–13).

313). Every definition of a policy problem represents some kind of reduction of reality. It emphasizes some aspects of the problem and neglects others. It may strengthen the perspectives of some groups, while the perspectives of others are excluded.

The process of policy formation, as I approach it, is close to Hall's (1993) notion of learning. Hall 'cautions us against positing a too rigid distinction between "politics as social learning" and "politics as a struggle for power"' and 'suggests that "powering" and "puzzling" are often intertwined in the formation of public policies' (Hall 1993: 292). This is a notion that is well reinforced by knowledge sociologists (see, e.g., Latour 1987, 2005), as well as by Foucault and his followers, in the notion of power and knowledge as interdependent and requiring each other. Hence, even though policy formation is a process of policy puzzlement and learning (Hall 1993, referring to Hecló 1974), I wish to avoid the connotation of rational progression that the concept of learning may imply. Defining an ideational shift as progression indicates that there is a fixed and agreed-upon set of criteria in relation to which progress is made. Defining an ideational shift as rational (in the rationalistic sense) neglects the value dimension of social policy issues (Stone 1997, Fisher 2003; cf. March & Olsen 1998). Progressive learning within the social sciences can only be made in relation to values, a point that will be illuminated in the following section on the nature of wicked problems.

3.2 Wicked policy problems

To account for the complexity of policy problems, Rittel and Webber (1973) distinguished wicked problems from tame problems.⁷ A tame problem entails a tangible and exhaustible definition of the problem and thereby a determinate solution that might solve the problem. Wicked problems,

⁷ There is a contemporary re-emergence of wicked problems as a concept within the public administration literature (see, e.g., O'Toole 1997, Roberts 2000, Van Bueren *et al.* 2003, Head & Alford 2008, Weber & Khademian 2008, Ferlie *et al.* 2011). In this section I have chosen not to engage in that debate, since the concept of wicked problems, within that discussion, has a tendency to be reduced to signifying a policy problem that goes beyond the scope of a single agency. The argument that wicked problems are best governed through networks (see, e.g., O'Toole 1997, Van Bueren *et al.* 2003, Ferlie *et al.* 2011) thereby may become a tautology. However, I will be referring to that literature in section 3.4 and return to the debate in chapter 6.

on the other hand, are characterized by the following features (based on Rittel & Webber 1973):

- There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem. The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways.
- Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem. It is therefore possible to engage in backward mapping to identify higher-level problems (Head & Alford 2008).
- Wicked problems, therefore, have no definitive solution; they have only resolutions that cannot be considered true or false, only good or bad.
- Every (attempted) solution to a wicked problem is a ‘one-shot operation’; the effects of the intervention alter the situation and cannot be readily undone. There is therefore no opportunity to learn by trial and error. Every wicked problem is essentially unique.

As the points above suggests, one of the most intractable aspects of wicked policy problems is to define them; to identify where in the complex causal network of social phenomena the problem really lies (Rittel & Webber 1973: 159). The definition of a wicked problem (and its solution) is never absolute. And since an exhaustive definition is not tangible, it is not possible to arrive at a definition (and solutions) by means of more comprehensive research (cf. Gallie 1955, Schön & Rein 1994). I will in the following section argue that a policy problem is constructed and not identified; it is a representation of reality (Bacchi 2008), and as such, it can never be objective.

3.2.1 Policy problems as constructs

It is well theorized and debated how a specific policy problem reaches the political agenda (Kingdon 2003, Baumgartner & Jones 1993). Many researchers have likewise been devoted to examining how a specific policy problem is addressed, why and with what results (see, e.g., evaluation research, or research on decision making). However, the way a policy problem comes into being has been a more neglected issue (Stone 1997). A reason for this is arguably the dominance of a perception of problems as objective facts to be discovered and altered.

From a constructivist perspective a problem is not discovered, but invented (see Lee 2007) or socially constructed (cf. Weick 1995: 162–163).

That a situation is considered as a problem, and what kind of problem, depends on how it is represented: how it is categorized and how the situation is framed (see, e.g., Stone 1997, Bacchi 2008). Unemployment may serve as an illustrative example. First of all, the existence of unemployment as a category is contingent on contemporary societal arrangements. That is to say, that someone can be unemployed depends on a system where people can be employers or employees. How large the percentage of unemployment can be at an aggregate level before being considered a problem is dependent on theoretical presumptions and has changed over time. For the unemployed the experience of being unemployed, the expected ways of reacting to it, as well as the possibility of becoming employed depend on where society puts the blame for unemployment, thus how unemployment, as well as the unemployed, is interpreted. 'A problem' is therefore always an interpretation as well as a consequence of interpretations. To label something a problem is a consequential act. It defines the issue as undesirable and puts it on a list of situations for attention and solution. 'Once something is labeled a problem, that is when the problem starts' (Weick 1995: 90), and actions are called for.

Thus, to argue that policy problems are constructs does not imply that there is no material side to those phenomena. On the contrary, the construction of meaning has material expressions. Policy researchers with a theoretical grounding in discursive theory have upheld the configurative aspect of policy formation, its constitutive power (see, e.g., Bacchi 2008). The representation of a social problem should not be seen as a direct reflection of reality, 'but [as] the practices through which things take on meaning and value; to the extent that a representation is regarded as realistic' (Shapiro, cited in Bacchi 2008: 37). Policy has a constructive power (Bacchi 2008). It forms categorizations and interpretations of people and their acts, and by doing that it imposes identities and behaviours. Indeed, a central point made by discourse theorists is that words are not only about the world but they also form the world as they represent it (Wetherell *et al.* 2001).

To illustrate this point I will refer to two examples showing how policy may form reality as it represents it. First, it has been suggested that the implementation of organizational ideals in public organizations, which builds on the idea of individuals and organizations as driven by maximization of self-interest, could progressively alter the institutional culture and individual behaviours in line with egoistic and gain-oriented values (Christensen *et al.* 2005: 212). Through the rationality of its organization an

institution represents certain values as essential and thereby incites acts in their accordance. If actors internalize these assumptions, evaluation of the organizational model may well confirm the rationalist assumptions behind the initiation (cf. Hay 2004a).

A somewhat different example comes from Bacchi (2008: ch. 10), who illustrated how defining sexual harassment as *sexual* harassment implies that there is something sexual about it, and thus also something natural. Since the act could be defined as natural, it has to be proven that the act was clearly disapproved. This representation of the behaviour neglects that these acts are acts of power and exclusion and are rarely sexual in nature, though one sex intentionally or unintentionally seeks to dominate the other. However, how the problem is represented (e.g. in law or policy) may normalize forms of behaviours and determine what needs to be changed. Both directly (through the practice of law) and indirectly (through the norms expressed), the interpretation of the problem shapes identities and behaviours. At the same time it excludes competing interpretations of the same act, and other ways of addressing it. To treat a social problem as an objective fact conceals the inherent value dimension.

To understand the formation of policy problems, a framework is needed that captures the constructive process, that is to say, how meaning is attributed to a phenomenon.

3.3 Attributing meaning – the process of sensemaking

When we make sense of a situation, within research as well as in everyday life, what we use is a frame(work).

There is no way of perceiving and making sense of social reality except through a frame, for the very task of making sense of complex, information-rich situations requires an operation of selectivity and organization, which is what ‘framing’ means. (Schön & Rein 1994: 30)

A frame consists of belief, perception and appreciation (Schön & Rein 1994: 23) that structure information and direct the interpretations of a situation. A frame is often organized around concepts and metaphors.⁸ ‘Unsafety’ or ‘sustainability’ are in themselves unspecified terms. However, within a policy discourse they become loaded with meaning, making them

⁸ A metaphor is a phenomenon that is understood or experienced in terms of another, and thereby acquires its features (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

central building blocks of a storyline. A storyline has the function of an example that expresses the belief, perception and appreciation of the frame. When a concept becomes a metaphor within a policy discourse, it may function as a short version of a central storyline (including its pre-suppositions), which means that the use of the metaphor implies the whole storyline. Dominant metaphors come to be taken for granted and gain self-evidence, which makes them powerful.

The use of storylines as examples is a key feature of human expression, and perception. Weick put it this way:

When people are asked to describe their ideology, they start with examples that imply patterns of belief within which those examples make sense. Stories that exemplify frames, and frames that imply stories, are two basic forms in which the substance of sensemaking becomes meaningful. (1995: 131)

Ideology, paradigms and tradition can all be applied as meta-frames, but frames can also be more specific, as for example, dominant codes of action within an institution, the jargon of a group of friends or a consumer discourse. Thus, in extracting cues and using frames, sense is made by the creation of a storyline. The storyline reduces complexity; it not only tells us which aspects are important but it also excludes other aspects or explanations. It condenses and summarizes complex narratives, so that they can be used as 'shorthand' in discussions (Hajer 2006).

Numbers may have the same function as metaphors. They categorize, select the features of something and exclude other features of the phenomenon (Stone 1997: 165). When we measure something, generally to learn more about that phenomenon, we reduce a lot of information. Sensemaking within the policy formation process could be perceived as a search to re-establish or compensate for that lost information. Policy actors and researchers interpret the quantitative indicators to provide an account of what they (may) tell us about reality. As with metaphors, numbers offer a normative leap from description to prescription (Schön & Rein 1994, Stone 1997: 148). We rarely measure things, except when we want to control them (Stone 1997: 167–168). However, the way we measure a phenomenon also constrains our understanding of it (see, e.g., paper III) and thereby also delimits the prescriptions considered relevant.

For the study of policy formation I find three aspects of the sensemaking particularly important to emphasise. First, sensemaking is directed by plausibility, rather than accuracy (Weick 1995: 55–61). Complex policy

issues can be informed, but not resolved, by ‘facts’ (Schön & Rein 1994). The understanding of a policy problem, which gives it legitimacy as a policy issue, is not neutral, or tangibly encompassing. Nor is the preferred state, which implies ‘the problem’, value neutral; hence, policy issues are not foremost about accuracy. Even within a particular frame, accuracy would be difficult to achieve. Due to a seemingly ever-increasing information flow, of statistics, research, practical examples and so forth, people need filtering mechanisms. Selective information is necessary and in a speed–accuracy trade-off, accuracy is likely to come up short (Weick 1995: 57). Weick (1995) even argued that the emphasis on accuracy is futile:

[I]n an equivocal, postmodern world, infused with the politics of interpretation and conflicting interests and inhabited by people with multiple shifting identities, an obsession with accuracy seems fruitless, and not of much practical help, either. (Weick 1995: 61)

Plausibility is not only more practical than accuracy. Plausibility is the best we can arrive at in the social inquiry of a contingent world. It is therefore important to further the understanding of the filters and mechanisms that structure sensemaking and help people (and organizations) cope with complex and ambiguous situations, and identify the plausible (Weick 1995).

The second aspect of sensemaking that should be emphasized concerns the crucial role that causalities play. Causalities are central building blocks of storylines and frames (see, e.g., Stone 1989, Schön & Rein 1994, Weick 1995, Stone 1997, Hajer & Laws 2006, Hajer 2006). Once a problem is identified, the search for its cause begins. For research, the aim tends to be to identify *the* main causes. For policy practice and politics, finding the cause is about identifying the relevant interventions, as well as attributing blame and responsibility (Stone 1997: 189). Numbers (and their correlations) are used to authenticate a story (Stone 1997: 172). Though causalities rarely are well established by social scientific research,⁹ their proclamation draws on the scientific discourse, which offers legitimacy and a sense of certainty. At the same time the central use of causalities in percep-

⁹ The researcher is always dependent on theory to interpret a relationship between different variables, as well as to distinguish and operationalize the variables/concepts in the first place. An empirically identified correlation is therefore infused by interpretations. In addition, the complexity of the social world tends to make the explained variance relatively small.

tion and sensemaking strengthens the influence of positivistic research. The intuitive search for causalities creates a demand for research claims that may (dis)confirm them. However, the use of numbers has an appearance of preciseness that hides the categorization, interpretation and exclusion that is inherent. Stories thereby generally overstate the strength of causalities, and ‘simulate the effect of tight coupling in a complex world’ (Weick 1995: 130).

Third and last, the sensemaking process is social, and driven by action (Weick 1995, Weick *et al.* 2005). Action shapes the contexts as well as the available information. The categories and their boundaries are constantly reproduced, as individuals interact to make sense of a complex reality (Fischer 2003: 113, building on Hajer 1995). As people start to act in accordance with a particular understanding, they create/materialize that same order. Webs of meaning tie elements together cognitively, and these presumed ties are given more substance when people act as if they are real (Weick 1995: 53–54). It could be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Weick 1995: 54). Though the initiation of change may be done individually, making change is necessarily a collective process. Discursive power mechanisms operate when meaning becomes collective and structures actions, which in their turn reinforce that particular understanding. To analyse policy formation in terms of a sensemaking process implies analysing the interaction between structures and actors. In the following section I will further discuss the relationship between the two, and how that relationship is represented in different theories.

3.3.1 The meaning-making human

When applying a specific theory, the attention is directed towards a specific set of factors, while others are downplayed. As a consequence, different theories may come into conflict with each other, and proponents of the different theories fall into dispute over the other theories’ ‘exclusion’ of factors. Bluntly put, theorists who emphasize the structures are accused of rendering the individual redundant. Discourse and ideational theorists tend to be characterized as structure deterministic, which I maintain is generally a false assumption (see Persson 2013). An important contribution from discourse theory is the account of the power mechanisms that can be traced through the use of language: the medium through which they operate, and through which meaning is established. Though discourses structure behaviours and perception, these webs of meaning are also dynamic and can be changed (see, e.g., Howarth 2007). By revealing dis-

cursive structures, such as the structuration behind the representation of a social problem (cf. Bacchi 2008), limitations of our understandings of that social phenomenon, as well as the consequences of those limitations, may become apparent (see, e.g., Torfing 1999: 153, Hajer 1995). Making the discursive structures that direct human perception more explicit opens up the possibility to change the discourse, for example, by questioning causalities of the leading storylines. While structures are at the centre of the analysis, identifying and enlarging the space of action is the major contribution.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, I suggest that theories based on a methodologically individualist ontology are more likely to fall into the structuralist trap. The core assumption that the opportunity structure dictates the rational choice serves to make political behaviour predictable, but at the same time eliminates human agency (Hay 2004a). Attempts to theoretically account for the indeterminacy of human agency and preferences, by including ideas in the rational choice framework and allowing them to constitute interests, puts the hard core of rationalist theory into question (Blyth 2003).

When ideas are allowed to give content to interests, the sparse, elegant, predictive, and parsimonious structure of rational choice theory becomes compromised since one can no longer assume transitive preferences, given interests, or a coherent methodologically individualist ontology. (Blyth 2003: 697)

At the same time, if the core assumption of rational choice theory is accepted, the rational choice becomes an empty choice (Hay 2004a), and the incentive structures become the explanans.

Rationalist theory has had a strong, if not dominating, influence on social science in the West (March & Olsen 1984). However, characterizing political behaviour and processes as essentially rational has been widely disapproved, based on not only on ontological shortcomings but also practical reasons (e.g. Lindblom 1959). Herbert Simon originated the notion of bounded rationality. That rationality is bounded implies that actors' rationality is limited by time and capacity and confined to available information. Policy actors are often confronted with more possible information and greater complexity than comprehensively assessable (Jacobs 2009: 256). Ideas make complex issues manageable by guiding and constraining processes of reasoning, and by gathering and interpreting data (Jacobs 2009: 256).

Limited information induces uncertainty and triggers interpretation to compensate for the missing information. Therefore, a sensemaking process always precedes a decision; ‘sensemaking sets the frame within which decisions are made’ (Weick 2001: 460; cf. Fischer 2003: 159). Or, as Stone (1997: 375) put it: ‘calculation cannot occur until we already have categories in place.’ In order to fit reality into these categories interpretations and considerations are unavoidable. The only way we can know reality is by categorizing it, naming it and giving it meaning (Stone 1997: 375). Behaviour is only rational in relation to a particular frame. What our interests are depends on how we interpret the situation. In that sense, interests (as well as problems) are constituted by ideas (cf. Blyth 2003).

Thus, sensemaking is an essential process for humans. I even argue that making sense of a situation and thereby giving it meaning is the essential process that drives, and may characterize, human activity. The essence of political action is the actors’ striving to make their interpretation of a situation influence policy, and thereby affect the structuring of the social world. Political struggles are thus essentially over meaning, rather than matter¹⁰ (Stone 1997: 376).

3.4 Governing wicked problems

Policy fields that address wicked problems tend to emerge as mobilizations around policy metaphors. Conceptualizations that are intuitive or fashionable turn into policy metaphors that attract human, economic and intellectual resources. The metaphoric use of these concepts often conceals their ambiguous nature. Rein brought our attention to the mobilizing potential of fashionable though vague concepts and theories:

Some examples are the use of ideas like ‘sustainability’, the ‘informal sector’, and ‘organizational learning.’ These concepts are hard to define but nevertheless can be useful in both mobilizing action and charting a course for research and enquiry. The world of action and research are linked, because once a vague concept is accepted in the field of practice, and resources become available, then the academic community becomes involved in the evaluation of outcomes and in the design of future policy. (Rein 2006: 392)

¹⁰ This is not to say that meaning and matter are opposites. On the contrary, they are interrelated; meaning shapes matter and matter triggers meaning-making.

These concepts have an intuitive appeal, as they capture and symbolize key themes within contemporary discourses (the statement is further elaborated below). At the same time their vagueness allows for divergent interpretations and thus for multiple actors to ascribe their meaning to the concept. However, the vagueness also triggers a continuous search for clarity, wherefore these policy fields are closely related to knowledge production.

The mobilization around such concepts fuels the development of new institutional arrangements around the ‘pressing policy issues of today’, for example, sustainable development, disaster resilience, public safety and public health. Though a particular phenomenon may have endured, how it is interpreted, and what it tells us about where we are in relation to where we want to be, is time and context specific. The interpretations of these problems tell a story about the distance to the preferred state, where social, health or environmental risks are solved, or are at least controllable. They are stories of decline (of good), of helplessness and of possible control (Stone 1997: ch. 6; cf. the policy idea-complex, section 2.1). Hence, they are all part of a greater story about the state of our society and the major challenges it faces. The ‘problems’ mentioned are cues in this greater story. As such they support the greater story, and at the same time they gain meaning from it. These ‘problems’ are situated as parts of a puzzle, which picture exceeds institutional as well as geographic boundaries. The wicked problems and their interconnected stories, which the policy fields of sustainable development, public health and public safety have to handle, diffuse the responsibility.

In politics, ironically, models of complex cause often function like accidental or natural cause. They postulate a kind of innocence, because no identifiable actor can exert control over the whole system or web of interactions. Without overarching control, there can be no purpose and no responsibility. (Stone 1997: 196)

With no one specifically responsible (for example, for effects that are being ascribed to the globalization of society), one step towards depoliticization is taken. This does not mean that a policy problem becomes less political per se, but that the political dimension of the representation of the problem becomes concealed. The central role of knowledge production and dissemination in such policy fields is also a form of depoliticization (see the next section).

It is possible to identify some general trends in the institutional arrangements of policy fields that govern wicked problems. To get a perspective on the time-specific characteristics of institutional arrangements it is useful to talk about three different generations of policy fields (Montin 2007). First-generation policy fields are the initial institutions of national democracy (e.g. defence and taxation), while second-generation policy fields are the sectoral institutions emerging with the welfare state (Montin 2007). Policy fields that have become institutionalized over the last decades are generally dominated by characteristics other than those of the traditional policy fields, and these are the ones that Montin defined as third-generation policy fields. Policy fields cannot simply be ascribed to one or the other of these generations on the basis of when they were institutionalized. Nor should these categories be viewed as mutually exclusive; a policy field may bear characteristics of more than one. However, the contribution of the conceptualization of policy generations is that it illustrates changing conditions in policy fields over time and may thereby give perspective on contemporary institutional/organizational trends. The conceptualization of third-generation policy fields is fruitful for my elaboration, in identifying the particular institutional conditions of newer policy fields that govern wicked problems.

Third-generation policy fields are emerging around ideas about the pressing problems or challenges of contemporary society, problems defined as complex, multidimensional or wicked problems (Rittel & Webber 1973, Sørensen & Torfing 2011: 6). Governance through networks is often considered to be the most suitable organizational model for finding effective solutions to complex problems (O'Toole 1997, Van Bueren *et al.* 2003, Sørensen & Torfing 2011, Ferlie *et al.* 2011). Indeed, third-generation policy fields are institutions born in the governance era, a time signified by an extended existence and influence of interorganizational networks (Rhodes 1996). Governance often refers to a change in the process of governing, a changed condition for ordered rule, or the new methods by which society is governed (Rhodes 1996: 652–653; see also Daly 2003: 116, Pierre 2009: 40). As such, it is related to other contemporary processes of change, such as globalization, the managerialist trend within public administration, the downsizing of public organizations (Rhodes 1996, Pierre & Peters 2000, Pierre 2009) and an individualization that the enhancement of self-governing of current welfare reforms fuels (Daly 2003: 117–118). Representations of these processes are active within the

policy formation process, where they provide frames that influence the formation of public safety policy in Sweden (papers II, III).

The third-generation policy fields generally don't have any distributive functions, but are a way of organizing existing resources in new ways. The aim is to build institutional capacity around the social issues that they are intended to govern (Montin 2007; cf. Pollitt 2003). The problems (as they are represented) are generally not limited to the tasks of a single policy field, nor are they generally restricted to affecting but one political level. The main function of these authorities is therefore coordinative. The primary aim of the coordination is directed and collective learning. Concerning safety policy, the dominant instrument of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ), the central authority assigned to these policies, is knowledge:

BRÅ is an authority that works to reduce crime and increase feelings of safety in society by producing facts and spreading information on crime and crime prevention. BRÅ also produces the official crime statistics, evaluates reforms, conducts research to develop new knowledge, and supports local crime prevention. (BRÅ's homepage, accessed 13.02.08, author's translation)

Thus, instead of using traditional steering mechanisms, the authority is assigned to produce and propagate knowledge and 'facts'. From an interpretive perspective this means of steering has an ideological dimension (cf. Rothstein 2005: 15, Montin 2007), as knowledge and values are intertwined (this proposition is further elaborated in the next section). The task to initiate, coordinate and communicate relevant knowledge makes networks, partnerships and interorganizational cooperation the arranging principles (Montin 2007). Thereby, the institutions are put at arm's length from the traditional political accountability structure. The professional activities, in particular the fieldwork, are commonly carried out in the form of projects.^{11, 12}

These changing forms of policy institutions, in particular their knowledge procedures, alter the conditions for power to operate. They put the relationship between power and knowledge in the fore. The primary

¹¹ The projects are often expected to persist in the established institutions (Montin 2007), or at least to bolster initiatives and learning.

¹² In paper I, we identify project financing as a crucial steering mechanism, by which we investigate the influence exerted by the national policy level on the level of practice, which is local.

aim of these policy institutions is to enlighten and to shape our understanding of a particular problem and how it should be addressed (Rothstein 2005, Montin 2007). The fact that knowledge is both a means and an end for the policy institutions of the third generation puts a legitimating chimera of objectivity over them. However, these institutional assignments could be identified as a politicization of the public authorities (cf. Rothstein 2005). The authorities have to a larger extent taken over both the problem-defining assignment and the expert and opinion-making role.

3.4.1 What is political about steering by means of knowledge?

From an objectivistic standpoint there is nothing ideological about knowledge-based steering. In fact, applying *objective* knowledge to social problems would count as an ideal public institution. However, since the early years of the academic field of public policy (in the 1960s and '70s), the hope for scientific solutions to pressing social problems has ceased within the social sciences. Though it could be argued that rationalist aspirations flourish within public organizations,¹³ critical voices are becoming more influential within the academic debate, in particular in Europe. The idea of a rationalistic use of knowledge has been contested, and the entwinement of values and facts has been stressed (Fischer 2003, Jasanoff 2004, 2012). Policy-related research is now more rarely viewed as completely independent from policymaking and implementation. The two shape each other and are even viewed as intrinsically related (Fischer 2003, Jasanoff 2004, 2012, Lee 2007, Lidskog *et al.* 2010, paper IV).

The criticism directed towards the objectivistic knowledge view has bearing not only on the academic world, but also on modern bureaucratic culture. Modern bureaucratic culture is permeated by the (in essence) same technical rationality that has become questioned within the academic realm. The use of knowledge as a steering mechanism is an example. That problem formulation is decentralized to the bureaucracy assumes that a problem can be objectively defined. Fischer (2003: 14) wrote:

¹³ Such aspirations create a demand for effect studies of different sorts (e.g. evidence-based solutions or accounts of 'what works'), and thereby indirectly influence directions within the social sciences.

In the administrative managerial realm they [policy problems] are processed by technical methods that treat them as questions of efficiency, performance, and predictability amenable to bureaucratic decision procedures. The positivist methods of policy analysis have thus served intentionally or unintentionally to facilitate and bolster bureaucratic governance.

When conforming to the bureaucratic imperative of impersonality and value neutrality, emotional and conflict-ridden political questions tend to become translated into scientific and technical answers (Fischer 2003: 13–14). Thus, steering by means of knowledge or ‘facts’ is not an objective means of steering. Causal investigations cannot be performed without categorization, defining boundaries and interpreting social phenomenon. This does not imply a criticism directed towards the dimension of interpretation, which is unavoidable (see also Methodology and materials); on the contrary, it insists that the dimension of interpretation should be brought to the fore. The underlying assumptions and propositions of knowledge claims may operate below the surface of policies, by influencing the meaning ascribed to a particular phenomenon, which may then influence action and thereby materialize the premises for those interpretations. Using knowledge production and dissemination to steer public organisations could therefore be conceptualized as discursive steering (cf. Lidskog *et al.* 2010: 7–8). Revealing the interpretations and the underlying assumptions of the ‘facts’ and values that influence and legitimize policy is thus one of the central tasks in analysing the formation of policy (problems) (Stone 1997: 135, Fischer 2003; cf. Hay 2004b).

When public authorities are assigned to produce knowledge, such as problem conceptualization, statistics or good examples, and apply it as a means for steering the policy practice, political power is moved from the elected representatives to the bureaucrats. Discursive disputes (i.e. disputes over principle propositions or interpretations of reality) are played out between central bureaucrats and not politicians (see, e.g., Rothstein 2005). Political decision-making and policy formation is thereby delegated. Civil servants acquire the authority to produce, as well as to initiate and finance, production of knowledge. They are assigned to write state-of-the-art reports and identify best practices, often with a hastening deadline. With these assignments comes power (not necessarily acknowledged or

aspired to) to differentiate between knowledge claims, to strengthen positions and to silence others.¹⁴

Since production and transmission of knowledge are central parts of policy formation, policy ideas tend to cross national borders. The chimera of objectivity and value neutrality that the objectivistic knowledge view has attached to ‘knowledge-based policy’ is an incentive for spread and convergence. If there is ‘one’ objective solution to be found, it is likely to be assumed that policy would converge in that direction. If policy can be value neutral, and based on general causalities, then ‘the true’ response is findable. In the next section, the diffusion of policy ideas will be further addressed and advanced from an interpretive perspective.

3.4.2 Transnational diffusion of ideas

Understanding how ideas travel and spread is relevant for understanding new policy fields in two respects. First, the mere existence of these policy fields could be seen in the light of policy diffusion and translation. The same field generally exists in different countries and at different levels (Montin 2007). From a rationalistic perspective the diffusion of policies could be understood as a response to similar developments and social problems, resulting in policy convergence (Freeman 2006: 369). Such an assumption, in its strictest sense, builds on a conception of history as efficient and of action as based on the logic of consequence (see March & Olsen 1998: 957). However, policy actors tend to act in accordance with rules and practices that are socially constructed, indicating the appropriate way of acting (March & Olsen 1998: 951–952). The adaptation and implementation of policy may thus be triggered by factors other than the identification of a particular problem, and subsequently, its remedy (see chapter 1 and section 3.2.1). The problem formulation does not necessarily exist beforehand, but may be inherent to a policy idea-complex (Bacchi 2008). It has been suggested that policy ideas move in the form of metaphors (Freeman 2006: 371), that is, concepts or numbers loaded with meaning. Metaphors bring their frames and stories with them. ‘The problem’ may thereby be adopted together with the policy, and come to legitimate it in hindsight (Christensen *et al.* 2005; cf. Cohen *et al.* 1972, King-

¹⁴ The relative autonomy of Swedish authorities, due to the principal of the non-minister rule, reflects a conceptual separation between values (the political) and facts (the expert institutions) and between policy and implementation.

don 2003). ‘The problem’ may also be constructed in relation to the particular context during implementation (Wihlborg 2000, paper II).

Second, a main objective of the policy institutions of the third generation is to initiate, coordinate and communicate knowledge relevant for the policy actors, as a means for steering. To accomplish that, the policy actors may look at similar institutions in other geographical contexts, generally paying particular attention to those with high status, and thus legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Røvik 2000). The attempt to learn from the knowledge and experience of others brings about continuous ideational diffusion between institutions. The prominence of the United States and the United Kingdom as initial institutions within public safety policy, and as sources for learning for other countries, should be emphasized (Newburn 2002, Van Swaaningen 2005, paper III). The understanding of fear of crime/feelings of unsafety as a policy has now spread to numerous other countries as part of local crime prevention and community safety policies (Hughes *et al.* 2002, Crawford 2009a).

To get insights into the importance of policy diffusion for the governing of wicked problems, I will draw on organizational theorists whose theoretical elaboration of ideational diffusion and translation has become well acknowledged over the years (see, e.g., Meyer & Rowan 1977, DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Brunsson 1989, Czarniawska & Sevón 1996, Røvik 2000). The main empirical focus has been on modes for organizing and steering within the public and private sectors. Inspired by the classical works of Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), a literature has evolved that identifies mechanisms of legitimacy as separate from mechanisms of rationality. Modern and fashionable ideas bring legitimacy, without necessarily bringing support for the efficiency of their proposed solutions. Their attraction comes from their position as myths (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996, Røvik 2000).

So, what characterizes ideas that become fashionable, that spread and travel, and are translated into multiple contexts? Røvik (2000: ch. 3–5) has developed theoretical propositions about what determines the capacity of an organizational recipe to spread. What he called an organizational recipe is within the context of policy comparable to a policy’s idea-complex, that is, generally supported values combined with a policy solution and an explicit or implicit problem formulation (cf. Kingdon 2003, Olsson 2009, Bacchi 2008). My adaptation of Røvik’s (2000) proposition, to fit the world of policy, suggests that the following properties would

make an idea more likely to spread and have a wide influence (see also Stone 1997).

First, an idea-complex gains influence by *social authorization*, meaning that it is associated with an institution or institutions that are recognized as leading institutions and are considered authoritative in a transnational perspective (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Second, the likelihood for an idea to spread is greater if it is *theorized*, that is, portrayed as grounded on general causalities and thereby universal and applicable to most contexts. Third, a policy idea-complex that offers a *whole package*, including problem formulation, causes, remedies and specific policy solutions, and which thereby presents a problem that is controllable (Lidskog *et al.* 2010), is more likely to be embraced. Such packaging implies a restricted framing of the problem that at the same time makes the problem governable (Lidskog *et al.* 2010). A fourth factor is whether an idea-complex is *timely*, in the sense that it is perceived as a new and modern answer to its particular social problems, which derive from general societal developments or discourses. That is to say, it complies with dominant ideological trends and does not pose a threat to the dominant values. For example, as individualization has become a dominant feature of contemporary society, it is reasonable to propose that a policy idea that supports the notion of the autonomous individual and that does not explicitly act on group interests is more likely to be adopted (Christensen *et al.* 2005: 92). Lastly, a favourable characteristic is that its causal narrative is *dramatic*, for instance, that the story about how the particular policy issue entered the political agenda is memorable. This makes the idea stick.

The assumption that these factors increase the likelihood of a policy idea-complex spreading implies a rejection of the rationalistic view of the policy process (cf. Røvik 2000: 108), according to which the diffusion of policy would indicate it being an efficient solution to a common problem. An idea does not travel on its own, no matter how 'efficient'; an idea-complex that supports the structure of related dominant discourses has a greater chance of spreading.

So far, I have discussed the diffusion of ideas, and enablers of ideational transfer. However, that policy idea-complexes spread does not necessitate a convergence of policy. Convergence, through the diffusion of policy ideas, is counteracted by other processes. Pollitt (2001a, 2001b) has nuanced the convergence concept (influenced by Brunsson 1989), which opens up the possibility of a more elaborate understanding. Pollitt distinguished four degrees of convergence: discursive, decisional, practical and

output convergence (see papers I, II). Convergence at one stage may be followed by divergence at another. That convergence is followed by divergence can be explained by a process of translation, where a policy idea-complex is adapted to fit the particular context (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996, Johnson 2003, Sahlin & Wedlin 2008, paper II). A ‘new [policy] idea is often fluid, mutable, changing itself and its environment as it moves’ (Freeman 2006: 371). Thus, the translation process should be understood as two-directional. An idea-complex is not static; it changes and is rearticulated as it is implemented.

When a policy idea-complex travels and meets new contexts, paradoxes and inconsistencies are likely to arise. The implementing actors need to make sense of such paradoxes and inconsistencies; thus, a sensemaking process is triggered (paper II). As a consequence, the idea-complex is constantly modified, and its causal stories challenged. However, a consistent policy idea-complex also has a resistance to revision as it makes sense of the situation. Once a sense begins to develop, there is a moment of relief, and individuals have strong tendencies to extract the cues and ‘facts’ that support the emerging storyline, while information that disconfirms it tends to be discounted or reinterpreted (Weick 2001: 460, Jacobs 2009: 258).

4. Methodology and materials

In this chapter I discuss the methodological approach of this thesis, followed by an account of the different materials used in the papers.

4.1 An interpretive approach

Although seldom acknowledged in the methodology textbooks, social scientists can only *interpret* the meaning of their results against a range of explanations and understandings that themselves are products of other interpretations. Social and political theories, for this reason, remain radically empirically ‘underdetermined’. (Fischer 2003: 127, italicization in original)

An interpretive approach implies taking seriously the interpretive nature of knowledge production as well as of perception and meaning-making more generally. The arguments put forth in the theory section are central propositions for the methodology of this thesis. It has been argued that the essence of policymaking is the struggle over ideas and their meaning (Stone 1997), and that scientific expertise not only influences policy, but is itself influenced by power and politics (Fischer 2003: 35). To analyse the formation of policy, it is therefore important to understand how meaning is created and constrained. The task of an interpretive policy analyst is to uncover the defining claims of a particular position, or of an articulation of meaning (cf. Hajer 1995). By bringing such claims to light, the restrictive nature of the social becomes apparent. By the same token, researchers should be transparent and reflexive about the epistemological propositions that underpin their own research designs and conclusions (Fischer 2003, Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012).

When initiating an interpretive research project, it is customary to learn how the key concepts are discussed in the established research literature, though when turning to the field, the researcher wants to understand how the concept is used, or how the process is played out in practice. Interpretive research seeks the situated, contextual meaning, specific to those that relate to the object/policy/concept in their practice (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012). Separating and tracing the relationship between the meaning of the concept in the literature and the meaning of the concept in the field is the first step to understanding how the workings of scientists affect the meaning of a policy.

The interpretive research approach used in this thesis can be described as abductive. Abductive research starts from the identification of a puzzle,

a tension or a surprise (see section 2.2.1). This puzzle is generally based on a misfit between experience and expectation. In research the expectation is informed by theory (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 28). The puzzle could also represent a tension point, the fault line of dubious practices in policy and social action (Flyvbjerg *et al.* 2012a).¹⁵ The puzzle starts a sensemaking process, which is directed at identifying what would make this puzzle less perplexing (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 27). The process is not linear in that it follows preplanned steps. Rather, the research process is iterative and recursive. Every step informs the next. What is learned through one source informs the understanding of the next (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 32). What is observed ‘in the field’ may lead to new strands of research literature and incite new questions, which means that one simultaneously learns from and puzzles over empirical material and theoretical literature (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 27).

An abductive research process can be described as a spiral, rather than a linear process (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: ch. 2), which reflects the fact that it has no final end. The research process does not stop with identifying ‘the right answer’. There is no *the* right answer to be found in social research; there are partial and preliminary answers. A situational understanding can never be complete. The process could always have continued and the understandings of a concept/process/event have grown and changed, just as the policy formation process is continuous, and as the conditions and representations of a wicked problem constantly change as it is addressed (Rittel & Webber 1973) and rearticulated. The end of a research process is necessarily pragmatic. It stops when the researcher runs out of time, or perhaps because the object of study dissolves or transforms.

It is worth upholding the indicated parallels to what civil servants do. In fact, the sensemaking process that policy paradoxes trigger (see paper II) is essentially the same type of process as the abductive research process. However, there are at the same time critical differences. The interpretive research process has a constant reflexive engagement with theory. Re-

¹⁵ To identify and analyse tension points is central to the phronetic social science approach (Flyvbjerg 2001, Flyvbjerg *et al.* 2012b), which in many ways overlaps with the interpretive approach. However, the phronetic approach has an explicitly normative aim, to identify and problematize dubious social and political practices, and constructively help to develop new and better practices (Flyvbjerg *et al.* 2012a).

searchers scrutinize the coherence of their claims and allow a transparency of the process. In addition, the aim of the researcher is knowledge, while the aim of the civil servant is to shape policy. The sensemaking process of the interpretive researcher as well as that of the policy actor is ongoing and contextual, implying that an interpretive research study may not come to the same results if replicated a few years later; the meaning of a policy/concept/event is not constant, and neither is the context. The reliability of the results lies in the transparency of the process and the reflexivity of the researcher, while an important part of the validity is the coherence of the argumentation in the analysis.

4.1.1 Interpretive research and more conventional policy theories

As noted, theory has a central role in interpretive research. Theoretical assumptions inform the researcher's observations of the world. The puzzle, tension or surprise that initiates the research process is generally based on a discrepancy between theoretically initiated expectations and actual practice. The research process implies an iterative return to the research literature. However, in an interpretive study there is no specific literature that is to be tested. Guided by the puzzle, to make sense of the unexpected, the process may lead the researcher to explore varying streams of research. The findings of this kind of study may therefore speak to multiple fields. Consequently, the contribution of interpretive research is not about 'gap filling'. The notion of 'gap filling' builds on a perception of the (social) world as being tangible and exhaustible, while, from an interpretive perspective, the world of inquiry within social sciences is shaped by one's perception of the same and is thus intangible. The social world is socially constructed through a constant process of rearticulation and reinterpretation (Czarniawska-Jørges 1992, Torfing 1999, Fridolfsson 2006). It is through this process that we may come to understand its structures, patterns, routines, meanings and so forth.

So, what role does theory play in interpretive research? Indeed, to accept an interpretive methodology does not imply a rejection of the scientific project. What is rejected is the notion of an obtainable truth (Fischer 2003). Every observation of the social world implicates an interpretation. Theoretical frameworks should be understood literally as frames. Different frames make us see partly different things. They all have their strengths and weaknesses. The benefit of a framework is that it provides a common language and common questions, a means for communicating and adding different results to each other's. Theories can be seen as conversational

devices that bring stability and cohesion to the negotiation over interpretations (Czarniawska-Jørges 1992: 5). However, while a framework may add understanding to a particular issue, it may also ignore and hide perspectives. Thus, frames are constitutive of reality, and in that sense, political. Therefore, it is important to be transparent and reflexive. A crucial aspect of the use of theory is to reveal assumptions, and thus make the frame explicit.

Theoretical debates tend to be represented as polarized (as with political debates, for that matter). The reason for this is that our understanding is built up around dualities and differences (see e.g. Fridolfsson 2006). We understand a claim in part by what it is not. We understand a theoretical framework by, consciously or unconsciously, relating it to its opposite or ‘outside’ (Fridolfsson 2010).¹⁶ This way of organizing meaning emphasizes and creates differences. It (re)produces dualities. It incites a debate about right or wrong. However, one of the claims of the interpretive approach is its tolerance and indeed favouring of a plurality of perspectives (Czarniawska-Jørges 1992: 2).

4.1.2 An interpretive approach and quantitative analysis

Interpretive research is generally associated with qualitative materials. Though qualitative methods follow naturally from the propositions of the interpretive approach, this association is not a requisite. Interpretive research may analyse and generate quantitative indicators. The difference lies in the perception of the numbers. Numbers are not viewed as unequivocal referents of reality, but as with any literal statement, they are representations with inherent presumptions (Czarniawska-Jørges 1992). It is thus essential that the theoretical propositions of the indicators are transparent, and that the data ‘sticks close to the ground’ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 83). Moreover, the interpretive methodology implies that concept development should be prioritized, as opposed to repetition and cumulativeness, due to the contextual and changeable nature of the social.

¹⁶ In this thesis I have been inclined to avoid reproducing interpretive research as the constitutive outside of the hegemonic positivistic perception of research (see Fridolfsson 2010). However, it could be argued that it has not been avoided, since I refer to positivistic research and thereby indirectly support the positivistic hegemony. A positivistic researcher rarely if ever explains herself in relation to an interpretive standpoint.

A common view of the relationship between quantitative (survey studies) and qualitative research is that a qualitative case study may be suitable as a pre-study that generates hypotheses that can then be tested by a quantitative study (see Flyvbjerg 2006: 229 for a critique of this claim). The results from the quantitative study are typically intended to indicate whether the observation can be regarded as a general relationship (or even causality). However, it is also proposed that quantitative studies are suitable for identifying interesting cases or puzzles, while qualitative and interpretive studies are needed to make sense of these cases and obtain situated knowledge (see, e.g., Fischer 2003: 131). These two different approaches of method could be seen as going from closeness to distance or from distance to closeness. Following the interpretive methodology, it is possible to take a third approach. I see my quantitative study (paper IV) as any of the recursive, iterative circles of my research process. It is a piece of the puzzle, which moves the process forward towards a fuller understanding.

One reason I find it important to engage with the practice of calculations of causalities is that they play a central part in human perception. Therefore, they are powerful and formative. I disagree with an essentialist view that there are general laws to be discovered within the social sciences. However, there are contextual relationships. In addition, one generally makes sense of the surrounding world through the notion of causalities. Causalities are central building blocks in the storylines that make up a policy (Stone 1989, 1997, Hajer 1995, Fischer 2003: 147–159). One should be attentive to the role causalities may play as myths or metaphors. Since causalities play a central role in perception, it is important to pay careful attention to them. Exploring (causal) relationships may allow for the questioning of established assumptions and thereby advance the course of sensemaking.

4.2 Materials and method

The papers are based on different sorts of materials, depending on the nature of the question addressed. Different materials are also used within the same paper to address different aspects of the questions. Most importantly, however, using different sorts of materials is a means to obtain a stronger analysis, and a higher reliability. To analyse intertextually between different materials and sources is a mark of research quality within interpretive studies (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 88):

[D]ifferent types of data draw on ('cite') material from other kinds of data, such that the researcher can 'read across' them in interpreting meaning . . . seeing 'intertextual' links across data sources in ways that contribute to the interpretation of those data. (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 86)

In papers I–III additional materials have served as reference material. That is to say, those sources have not been used as primary sources for the analysis, but have functioned as background material and as a body of material that has informed the analytical categories and arguments. By identifying intertextual links between materials it is possible to verify the consistency of the representation of a text. Since a broad material obstructs close analysis, a pragmatic solution is to go deeper into selected parts of the material, while keeping connection with the whole set. Distinguishing between primary and reference material is generally not done explicitly. However, I have chosen to do so for reasons of transparency.

Table 1 offers an overview of the material used in each paper. I then discuss each empirical material in more detail, together with an account of how that material has been analysed.

Table 1. Materials specific to each paper

	Materials
Paper I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ds. 1996: 59 <i>Allas vårt ansvar</i>. Reference material: Governmental commission reports and programme evaluation – Documentation from policy conferences: National conference for local crime preventive work, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010 – Summaries of the project applications that were funded by BRÅ in 2004–2010 (in total, 100 projects)
Paper II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Eight in-depth interviews (four with politicians and four with civil servants) <p><i>Reference material:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local policy documents – Meeting minutes (when available)
Paper III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Observation (incl. recording and transcription) of two policy conferences arranged by SKL (<i>The Safeness Day</i> 2009 and 2010) – 13 in-depth interviews <p><i>Reference material:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Documents related to the conferences or referred to by key actors – Observations at four other policy conferences, arranged by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, Tryggare Sverige (Interest organization), Örebro University and Örebro municipality, Gothenburg municipality – Documentation from five policy conferences arranged by BRÅ (see paper I)
Paper IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Questionnaire (2010) sent to Vivalla (600) and Örebro city (400), with a net response rate of 43.6 per cent, sample n = 401

4.2.1 Interviews

Two of the papers (II and III) are based on interviews in combination with other material. In paper II the aim of the study was to analyse the process of sensemaking at the local policy level. Interviews provide an essential source (Denscombe 2000: 130) for understanding how the local actors make sense of national policy in relation to the local context. Though it could be argued that documents represent the outcome of sensemaking, they leave out much of the argumentation and the factors behind the final text (see Documents below). By doing interviews we can come closer to the world of practice, and grasp the multifaceted reality which is often reduced or compromised in official documents.

The interviews conducted for paper II were all based on the same questions. The interviews were semistructured (see Denscombe 2000: 135), and the questions were open ended. The questions concerned the respondents' assignments and background, their perceptions of the problem, the institutional arrangements, the interventions to address public unsafety, the development of the policy field in the municipality, how the respondents gain knowledge and ideas, and what challenges (general and context specific) they identified. My intention with the interviews was to capture the 'worldviews' of the respondents and the institutions they represented, in relation to the policy (cf. Esaiasson *et al.* 2007: 286). As the respondents answered the broader questions, I asked follow-up questions when I saw the need for an elaboration of the response. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety. The materials of each municipality were analysed in turn to identify the frames and storylines that gave meaning to the policy problem and that provided the rationality for the interventions. A comparative analysis of the four cases was then directed at identifying similarities and differences, and in particular to identify whether the divergent contexts showed different patterns (for more information about the research design, see paper II).

In paper III the interviews were used as a complement to observations. The paper analyses the policy reformation process of public safety policy in Sweden. Based on observations (see more below), key actors were identified, policy actors who had the intention and position to influence the understanding of the policy problem. The interviews had a double purpose, to understand whether and to what extent the key actors' roles in redirecting the policy field were based on strategic intention, and, if they were, to gain a deeper insight into how the actors worked to pursue their intentions. The other purpose was to get the interviewees' perspectives on

how the policy field had emerged and evolved in Sweden over the years, including the main factors affecting its course. The interviews have also been used as reference material when analysing the observations.

The interviews for paper III were structured around three themes: the development within the policy field, the role/use of knowledge and knowledge production, and policy networks. The respondents were introduced to each theme and were then able to speak rather freely around the topics. Thus, these interviews are closer to what Denscombe (2000: 135) defined as unstructured interviews. I used follow-up questions as well as directed questions in cases where central aspects had not come up. It also happened that I used detailed questions to verify statements from others. These interviews were not transcribed in their entirety. While listening and re-listening to the interviews I took notes and transcribed the parts that I identified as crucial for my analysis.

4.2.2 Documents

Documents are common sources within policy research. In policymaking, as in research, writing and reading are essential parts of the job (Freeman & Maybin 2011). Writing and reading are ways to shape one's understanding of an issue and to communicate it over time and space, which make documents primary artefacts of policy. Interpretive researchers see documents as expressions and reproductions of dominant norms and ideas. By analysing a document, patterns of thought can be identified (see, e.g., Esaiasson *et al.* 2007: ch. 12). The structuring of meaning can be revealed, which affects identities by shaping possible subject positions (Torfing 1999).

A policy document has a specific position as an authoritative representation. The norms and ideas that it expresses can therefore be expected to exert a greater influence on its surroundings. In paper I, Rolf Lidskog and I examine the extent of the influence of the transnational policy trend on Swedish policy. We analyse the national policy through the central policy document, *The National Crime Preventive Program* (DS 1996: 59 *Allas vårt ansvar*), while also taking into account closely related documents, including the governmental commission reports that preceded the establishment of the programme and the government's evaluation of the programme in 2001. From these documents we tease out the norms, ideas and identities that are reproduced.

Documents are generally understood within policy research as imprints of decisions that direct actions. They are treated as a source for identifying

the position of a particular institution on a particular issue (Freeman & Maybin 2011: 157). Thus, a policy document is used as material that represents the policy (often including practices) of a particular institution. Such an application is based on several assumptions: that this text is being read, that it influences practice and that the form the practices take is in accordance with the prescription of the policy. This is not necessarily the case, as Brunsson (1989) and Pollitt (2001a, 2001b) have illustrated by the distinction between talk (discourse), decision and practice.

A way to capture the effect of a document is to look at its influence on other documents (cf. Latour 1986). To understand the extent to which the national policy influenced the practice, we analysed two other sorts of documents closer to the world of practice, namely, documentation from policy conferences¹⁷ and project descriptions of local projects funded by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention.¹⁸ Based on content analysis, these documents were categorized, allowing us to get a quantitative overview (Esaïasson *et al.* 2007: ch. 11) of how local crime preventive work was represented at the national level through policy conferences directed at local practitioners; as well as in what direction the local practice was influenced through national funding. In that respect we analysed to what extent the ideas, norms and identities represented in the national policy also came through at the practice level, for national civil servants in their work to disseminate ideas, and local civil servants in their work to implement interventions. It should be noted that the overview provided by a quantitative content analysis is necessarily reached at the expense of a reduction of complexity. There were cases where a project or presentation entailed more than one rationale. In these cases we made an analytical judgement as to which was the dominant one. For more information about the categories see paper I.

Lastly, documents have been used as reference material. This is the case in papers II and III. In these cases the analysis was informed by reading different sorts of related documents: local policy documents, meeting minutes (paper II), reports and publications associated with or referred to at the policy conferences, publications initiated by the central actors and documentation from related policy conferences (paper III). Though these

¹⁷ The documentation contained an account of all speeches and workshops that were held at the conferences (about 500–1000 words per speech).

¹⁸ The project descriptions are short (about 100 words per project) and state the interventional content of the projects.

documents mainly were used to inform the analysis as well as to verify it, I do occasionally explicitly draw upon such documents when it serves to illustrate a particular point.

4.2.3 Observations

Documents are important material when analysing policy, in particular, since policy documents represent an official standpoint. However, though I have argued that documents are central artefacts of policymaking, there are essential aspects of policy formation, such as the practice surrounding a document, that are left out if one settles for analysing documents. Freeman and Maybin have argued that

[t]o understand implementation, . . . which we might think of as the realization of documents in practice, we need to understand what happens in the space between them. How is one document translated into another, by whom and what for? How is one document articulated with and in another? Even to begin to answer such questions, we need to know how documents are written and read, produced and received. (2011: 162)

One way that I have addressed these aspects is by using interviews (see above). Through interviews researchers can get the actors to tell them how they go about doing what they do, how they make sense of policy documents, as well as their views of the practice of policy formation and implementation. However, it is possible to get closer. By doing observations, the researcher can witness the process in the making (Denscombe 2000: 165). In paper III I use observations of policy conferences to analyse policy formation debates as well as the strategies used by the policy actors to change the understanding of the policy problem and thereby alter the direction of policy. The main focus of the paper is the entwinement of policy and research. I investigate how (and which) academic texts are articulated at the policy conferences, and what role these articulations have in shaping the policy discourse. For analytical purposes a policy conference can be perceived as a text. The two conferences central to the analysis were recorded and transcribed, turning them into texts also in a literal sense. One can then analyse how other texts relate to this text and how those relationships shape the meaning that the text comes to represent. Observations involve exposure to the field to witness the ongoing interaction between actors and texts. The observations have also been used to inform and guide the selection of interviews and documents.

When analysing the material my focus was on the meaning that was being represented and articulated at these conferences. I have therefore treated the text as a whole and as an institutional representation, whereas the individual participants have been anonymized. This decision has also an ethical dimension, since the organizers were informed about my project, while the participants were not. To trace patterns and themes in the material I have used the programme NVivo. I have identified and categorized representations of the problem of unsafety, as well as patterns that relate to those categories (such as the problem-defining level and the operative level [paper III]).

4.2.4 Survey

Paper IV is based on a survey study. Most of the quantitative studies within the research on fear of crime, as well as neighbourhood studies, are based on large-scale surveys (e.g. victim surveys or the World Value Survey). As I argue in paper IV, this research has received substantial criticism, due to the way the central concepts are operationalized. The way key concepts are measured (i.e. fear of crime, neighbourhood, risk) not only affects the research findings but also affects the policy discourse (paper III). From an interpretive perspective the criticism and shortcomings of earlier conceptualizations as well as operationalization must be taken seriously, as the construction of numbers and facts has a formative power (see e.g. Power 2004, Lee 2007). Quantitative research has a strong path-dependent tendency. The emphasis on time series, broad datasets and replication tends to constrain the conceptual development. Considering the criticism that has been put forward concerning the way fear of crime has been measured and conceptualized, I acknowledge an alternative way of conceptualizing and measuring the phenomenon generally conceived of as fear of crime (within the theoretical literature), using the concept ‘general feelings of unsafety’ (see Elchardus *et al.* 2008) as a dependent variable. The theoretical underpinnings of this concept largely reflect my observations from the field. In addition, I have based the sample populations on contextual knowledge, which allows for a more informed analysis that involves local specificity. Though these choices might seem unfavourable to the conventional quantitative researcher, they allow a more context-informed analysis.

The survey was designed to capture the specifics of feelings of unsafety, fear of crime and trust in institutions in Vivalla, a segregated, disadvantaged neighbourhood in Örebro, struggling with structural problems, in-

cluding relatively high crime levels. A randomized survey was sent to 1000 respondents (600 in Vivalla and 400 in Örebro city). The decision to address more respondents in Vivalla than in Örebro city was based on the recognized difficulties in receiving answers within structurally exposed areas. As could be expected, the response rate in Vivalla did not reach more than 30.8 per cent, while the response rate from Örebro city was 61.8 per cent (amounting in a total response rate of 43.6 per cent). For more detailed information on the data collection process, as well as controls for bias, see paper IV. The paper also contains a detailed account of the questionnaire and the reliability and validity of the constructs.

Regression analysis was used for statistical analysis of the material. The moderating effect of place was evaluated by subgroup regression¹⁹ (Hartmann & Moers, 1999). The significance of the differences between the subgroups was calculated using the z-score (Garson, 2011). More information about this analysis is provided in paper IV.

¹⁹ Using subgroup regression to test moderation equals a moderated regression analysis (MRA) when the moderator, as in this case, is dichotomous. MRA is the most common regression technique for evaluating moderation (Hartmann & Moers, 1999: 295).

5. Summary of the papers

5.1 Community safety policies in Sweden

In the first paper Lidskog and I explore to what extent the crime control trend has affected Swedish policy. The tension between the Swedish policy legacy and the trend of ideational convergence of community safety policy calls for an investigation of the influence of these ideas on Swedish policy. The expected outcome of the diffusion of policy ideas is policy convergence. To get a more nuanced understanding of the effects of policy change and ideational spread, it is necessary to consider the degree of policy convergence that they generate. Building on the works of Brunsson (1989), developed by Pollitt (2001a, 2001b), different levels of convergence are identified, namely, discursive, decisional, and practice convergence. Even though the policy discourse is affected by the trend, the ideational influence may not necessarily affect decisions. Likewise, changes in the policy discourse may be resisted by implementing actors or translated when turned into practice.

To account for the discursive and decisional level, we analyse the national policy (the current national crime prevention programme, including related documents) to see whether there has been any substantial change in line with the transnational trend. A particular feature of community safety policy is that it is locally implemented and generally managed through local networks. It is therefore relevant to consider the extension of the policy discourse. By analysing the ideational content of conference speeches from national policy conferences directed towards local practitioners, we aim to capture the transfer of ideas from national to local level; however, the analysis also gives an indication of the direction of the local practices, since several of the plenary sessions and seminars at these conferences focused on exchanging experiences from local practices. Lastly, we examine the aim and direction of local projects funded by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention from 2004 to 2010, to investigate how these ideas affect local practices.

The analysis of the national policy level shows that Sweden has taken a preventive turn in crime prevention policy, and thus been affected by the transnational policy trend. All of the main propositions of the idea-complex are to some extent identifiable in national policy, though the trend has not become as far reaching as in many other European countries (particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries). When analysing the themes of

the policy conference speeches, the influence of the Swedish policy legacy becomes apparent. Included in these networks and practices are representatives from the traditional policy sectors, foremost the police and the social services, where the policy legacy is more efficacious. However, the influence of the preventive turn is apparent, not least through the focus on risk groups and risk factor assessments within the category of social prevention. An analysis of the local projects granted financial support reveals that coherence with the transnational policy trend also reaches the level of practice. With few exceptions the projects that could be categorized as social prevention concerned the need to address specific risk groups, which reflects a type of social prevention different from that previously applied through the Swedish welfare state. Thus, there has been a shift from the influence of a social justice discourse to one influenced by risk management (see Edwards & Hughes 2012: 448). In addition, we found a greater focus on situational crime prevention than on structural explanations, and an emphasis on partnerships and networks as solutions to these emerging social problems.

We conclude that the explanations and solutions offered by Swedish crime prevention policy have converged in line with this preventive turn; in this, the policy represents a break from Sweden's crime prevention policy legacy. It may seem surprising that Sweden has become fertile ground for the preventive turn to take root, due to the policy legacy as well as the current problem situation. However, there have been substantial cutbacks in welfare services over the last few decades, which should not be neglected as a crucial background to these shifts in crime prevention policy. Currently, Sweden provides a mixed picture. An understanding, directions and practices are developing that are more or less in line with the preventive shift in crime control policy. At the same time, a still vital part of Swedish crime prevention policy has continued emphasis on social crime prevention. This concerns in particular the interventions carried out by the traditional (second-generation) agencies, such as the social services, but which are now incorporated under the umbrella of crime prevention and public safety policy (cf. Gilling 1994).

5.2 Local sensemaking of policy paradoxes

In the second paper I study the interaction between global ideas and local context. I do so by focusing on the sensemaking process of local policy actors as they implement crime preventive policies influenced by the trans-

national idea-complex. When global ideas meet the local context, they need to be made sense of in relation to that particular context. The analysis follows the transnational idea-complex as it descends through national level down to local level with an emphasis on the inconsistencies that appear and how they are made sense of. As the transnational idea-complex of community safety is adopted at the Swedish national policy level, three inconsistencies become visible: the community safety policy is neoliberal (Hughes 2002, Crawford 2009b), while the Swedish policy legacy is social democratic; the problem description of the transnational idea-complex is not in accordance with the statistical findings of the situation in Sweden; and the policy emphasizes local solutions to local problems, although similar policy instruments are implemented in different local contexts. While there is an emphasis on context sensitivity, the policy field is permeated by an objectivist ontology that favours evidence-based solutions.

By focusing on how issues of safety and public fear of crime are understood and dealt with in the transnational idea-complex, in national policy and in various local contexts, the article addresses three questions: What policy incongruence appears? How is it made sense of in different local contexts? Is there convergence or divergence at the local (practice) level? By combining convergence theory (Brunsson 1989, Pollitt 2001a, 2001b) with the process-oriented sensemaking theory (Weick 1995), the interaction between structure and actors comes into focus. In the process of making sense of a policy problem the actors draw cues from the surrounding contexts, previous experiences, dominant discourse, research presentations and so forth. Therefore, the sensemaking process differs across municipalities, depending on the local context. Hence, from convergence at discursive and decisional levels, a divergence process is found at the local, practice level. Similar policy instruments are implemented, but for different reasons and to address partly different social problems. The detachment of the causality (of the transnational idea-complex) that rising crime levels cause rising levels of fear of crime/feelings of unsafety liberates the cue that people are feeling more unsafe. New frames are therefore used to make sense of the unsafety and what the main concern for the councils is.

One repeated storyline in the socioeconomically strong municipalities is that people are feeling more unsafe in a progressively safer society. The major driver in this storyline is the argument of a sensationalized media, lacking nuance and giving a one-sided image of the society. Having a local crime prevention council supports the image of an unsafe society, leaving the municipalities in a paradoxical situation, caught between legitimacy

(by being reactive to a perceived problem) and efficacy (by not fuelling unsubstantiated perceptions). Thus, solving social problems and counter-acting crime is not the major reason for local crime preventive work in these areas. However, the policies are seen to fit best in the socioeconomically strong areas with low crime.

In the socioeconomically weakest municipality, the social context is more complex. Consequently, the sensemaking process has a wider range of frames and cues. Structural explanations of crime and social exclusion, together with the individualization of society, are frames giving meaning to the unsafety that people feel. The policy is translated to fit the welfare institutions and the social democratic policy legacy. This is in line with studies showing that there are community safety workers who have regarded the policy as a means of resuscitating more social democratic politics of control (Hughes & Gilling 2004, Edward & Hughes 2009).

I have found that there is reason to nuance the criticism directed towards community safety and crime prevention policies, that they cause social exclusion and meet the demand for safety from the strong middle class with a disregard for more marginalized groups. The criticism seems to be more accurate in strong socioeconomic and homogeneous contexts, where the policies are also found to fit best without translation. However, the example of Botkyrka municipality shows that the idea-complex can be adapted to fit a more exposed and socially complex environment with a social democratic institutional setting, and the criticism does not seem to be as relevant here. The local nature of crime prevention policy may facilitate the adaptation of the policy to particular contexts and social problems. However, the case shows that it also delimits the opportunity to address structural issues (due to the segregated nature of local contexts), which need to be dealt with at the regional or national level.

5.3 A policy problem that cannot escape its past

The third paper analyses the policy formation process of public safety policy in Sweden. It looks at efforts to change the understanding of the policy problem and thereby alter the direction of the policy field. The paper takes its starting point in the entwinement of research and policy within this policy field (Lee 2007). The ‘invention’ of the policy problem of fear of crime in the 1960s in the United States came out of the introduction of large-scale victim surveys, where crime-related fear was operationalized and measured. This enumeration spurred a vast amount of research

on fear of crime, as well as policy initiatives, and has fed into the public discourse. One of the most influential findings has been the risk–fear paradox (that women and elders experience greater fear of crime, while their risk of becoming a victim is lower, and at the same time young men report the lowest level of fear of crime, while they face a greater risk of falling victim to it). This paradox lies at the heart of the research on fear of crime, and has not been unquestioned. Conceptualizations, operationalization and related policies have endured longstanding criticism. However, critical or alternative voices seem to have exerted limited influence on policy departments.

With this in mind the policy reformation attempts in Sweden become particularly interesting. As the first two papers showed, the community safety policy ideas did not enter the Swedish context unaffected. The sensemaking processes that the policy triggered at local as well as at national level revealed reactions and criticism in line with aspects put forth by critical researchers. By analysing the policy reformation process of public safety policy in Sweden, this paper examines how central actors acted to create an alternative understanding of the policy problem, and in particular, how their use of conceptual and critical research affected the policy discourse, and what factors constrained an alternative policy direction. The empirical material consists of observations at policy conferences, interviews with key actors and related documents.

A strategy applied by the policy actors was to seek, initiate and transmit alternative, critical research. Their aim was to change the conceptualization of feelings of unsafety and to challenge the contested trend towards control and security. They carefully considered when, where and by whom their perspectives and arguments might receive the best possible reception and effect. This strategy seeks to activate and capacitate potential opponents to the dominant ideas and direction within the policy field. When analysing the effect of these strategies on the policy discourse, I draw on discourse theory and build on the growing literature that accords a central function to storylines in the policy formation (Stone 1989, 1997, Schön & Rein 1994, Hajer 1995, Fischer 2003).

The analysis shows that the policy problem's past constrains an altered understanding of the problem. I identify an ideational path dependency of the policy, thus a separate process from that generally referred to by path dependence (i.e. the influence of the institutional legacy, for example, national longstanding policy practices; see, e.g., Schmidt 2011: 109). Within the policy discourse, the idea of a risk–fear paradox has the func-

tion of a central metaphor. The black-boxing of the paradox constrains the policy discourse and restrains the reformulation of unsafety as a policy problem. The study shows that efforts to make 'new' sense of the policy problem by drawing cues from other discourses (such as the risk discourse or ideas about the pacifying welfare state), end up feeding the risk–fear paradox and thereby indirectly the connection to crime.

There are also institutional factors constraining an altered understanding of the policy problem. The storylines that upheld the policy problem as it was adopted determined the legitimate institutional setting for dealing with it, which in turn affects which actors take part in the policy formation process. Furthermore, a reformulation of the policy problem that lifts it out of that institutional framework deprives the problem of its current political legitimacy.

An important contribution of the theoretical framework applied in the paper is that it illustrates the interrelationship between different discourses (different policy fields, research and policy, global and local, or different countries). Webs of meaning tend to transcend policy fields and national borders; therefore, it might not only be the effects of such a dominant trend on policy institutions that should be considered as change, but perhaps more importantly, the discontinuation of it.

5.4 The relative importance of institutional trust

The fourth paper departs from a critique of how fear of crime has been measured. The research on fear of crime has been dominated by a rationalist paradigm, and leading researchers within the field have argued that it has been trapped within a restricting theoretical as well as methodological framework (Hale 1996, Ditton & Farral 2000). Over the last years another paradigm has started to emerge and challenge the rationalist one. This symbolic paradigm sees fear of crime as resulting from feelings of unsafety connected to macrosociological developments such as globalization, urbanization, emancipation, migration and secularization, and from attitudes of discomfort, threat and helplessness in the face of the consequences of such developments (Cops 2010). Taking such an approach has the potential to dissolve and give new perspectives on some of the methodological limitations of the rationalist paradigm, such as the risk–fear paradox, and the functional aspects inherent in fear of crime (Jackson & Gray 2010).

The analysis of the fourth paper is progressive in three aspects: first, by acceding to the emerging symbolic paradigm and contributing to the exploration of its potential; second, by exploring the effects of place, not only in terms of direct effects (which former research has disapproved) but also by considering potential moderating effects; and third, by designing the study for this particular purpose and thereby using relevant geographical boundaries, a measure by which many large-scale neighbourhood studies have fallen short. The aim of the study is to explore the effect of place on the neighbourhood inhabitants' general feelings of unsafety, while controlling for the structural characteristics of place. Hence, place is measured as a physical area with certain characteristics: the effect of place is examined as the residual explanation when other structural factors, characteristic for that place, are accounted for. The study examines two issues: first, the perception of place for feelings of unsafety, as an addition to the structural explanations, and second, the importance of place for feelings of unsafety in relationship to other variables (e.g. gender, age, interpersonal trust, trust in the police).

Thus, two theoretical models on the role of place in feelings of unsafety were tested. The findings show no unique effect of place on how unsafe one perceives the world to be. However, they show that place has a moderating effect on feelings of unsafety. Hence, a primary conclusion is that more complex mechanisms than direct effects should be considered when determining the effect of place and when searching for mechanisms behind feelings of unsafety. Living in Vivalla changes the influence of other factors on feelings of unsafety. In Örebro (and as reported in previous research) the variables with a unique effect on general unsafety are gender, age and education, together with generalized trust. The fact that women, elderly people and socioeconomically weaker groups experience greater feelings of unsafety is often ascribed to their greater vulnerability (Hale 1996), and for women in particular, it is connected to a socially constructed identity with an inferior power position (e.g. de Beauvoir 1986, Listerborn 2001). In Vivalla, these factors, with an established relationship to fear of crime, do not show a significant influence on feelings of unsafety. The factors that have a unique effect on feelings of unsafety are institutional trust, trust in the police and generalized trust.

Though we cannot draw general conclusions from this study, the findings are important, as they challenge established explanations. The results point in a partly new direction that assigns public institutions a central role in preventing feelings of unsafety in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

This result indicates that it is particularly in such areas that trustworthy institutions have the potential to generate feelings of safety and to neutralize the higher vulnerability and the greater risks these inhabitants face. These results are particularly important at a time when the welfare state is (or risks) being dismantled, when decommodification and redistribution are being rolled back, and when the trend is rather a reduction of social services in deprived areas.

5.5 An overview of the four papers

Table 2. An overview of the papers

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Focus	Ideational transfer	The sensemaking of policy paradoxes	Constraints on the policy discourse The entwinement of policy and research	The conceptualization of fear of crime The effect of place on feelings of unsafety
Main theory	Convergence theory Institutional legacy	Convergence theory Sensemaking (organizational theory)	Institutional theory Discourse theory	Fear-of-crime research The symbolic paradigm
Question(s)	To what extent has the crime control trend influenced Swedish crime prevention policy?	How are issues of safety and public fear of crime understood in the transnational idea-complex, in national policy and in different local contexts? What policy incongruence appears? How is it made sense of in different local contexts? Is there convergence or divergence at local level?	How did central policy actors act to create an alternative understanding of the policy problem? How have their use of conceptual and critical research affected the policy discourse? What factors constrained an alternative policy direction?	What effect does place have on general feelings of unsafety? Does place have a unique and direct effect on feelings of safety, or does it have a moderating effect? If the latter is true, how could we describe and understand that effect?
Method	Interpretive content analysis	Interpretive analysis, primarily influenced by sensemaking theory	Interpretive analysis, primarily influenced by discourse theory	Regression analysis Subgroup regression
Materials	Policy documents Documentation of policy conferences Project grants	Interviews Documents	Observations Interviews Documents	Quantitative questionnaire
Main contribution	<i>Empirical</i> The influence of the transnational idea-complex on Swedish policy The degree of convergence	<i>Theoretical</i> The mechanisms of divergence at local level through the process of sensemaking <i>Empirical</i> The unfolding of the policy ideas in different local contexts	<i>Theoretical</i> The path dependency of policy ideas The entwinement of policy and research may constrain policy reformation Towards a new perspective on policy change	<i>Theoretical</i> The moderating effect of place on feelings of unsafety <i>Normative/practical</i> The relative importance of well-functioning institutions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

6. Concluding discussion

In this thesis I have investigated how the policy problem of feelings of unsafety is given its meaning in a Swedish context. I have argued that to understand the process of policy formation it is useful to conceptualize it as a sensemaking process. This puts the attention on how the understanding of policy problems is shaped and made sense of, and situates this process as part of the constant meaning-making of humans. To analyse sensemaking mean paying careful attention to the way actors draw on different (e.g. scientific, popular or media) discourses to give meaning to a particular policy and to make sense of an articulated problem. Knowledge has a central role in this process. Policy actors bring the policy formation process forward not only by intentionally or unintentionally drawing on knowledge and experiences, while disregarding other knowledge claims, but also by initiating production of knowledge.

In this final section I will return to the questions that I introduced in the beginning: (a) how is the understanding of feelings of unsafety as a policy problem shaped and constrained in Sweden? and (b) what lessons can be drawn for the governing of wicked problems, such as feelings of unsafety?

6.1 Conditions that shape and constrain policy formation

Policy problems are interpretations of reality, and thereby represent reality in a certain way (Bacchi 2008). What is perceived as a problem, and how that problem is made sense of, depends on how the social world is ordered discursively. In that sense, policy problems could be conceptualized as ideas. This, however, does not mean that policy problems do not have a material side to them. How society is organized, how policies are formulated and designed and what categories people are sorted into have ideational as well as material effects; they shape identities, possibilities and actions. The structure of meaning and the events of the material world are mutually constitutive. There is a dynamic between them. Focusing on the structure and formation of meaning (represented by acts) makes it possible to analyse that dynamic and identify how the representations of reality are shaped and constrained. Such analysis draws our attention to the conditioning and contingency of the material world and makes it possible to identify alternative representations and thus alternative actions, identities and possibilities. Policy formation ascribes meaning to a social phenome-

non and discounts other interpretations. It thereby has an inherent value dimension.

How we understand a particular problem depends on what information is extracted, what knowledge is produced, and what frames are available to give meaning to that phenomenon. Thus, the understanding of a policy problem is shaped and constrained by conditions that direct attention and affect what frames that are available. I will particularly stress five factors that have shown to be important for how feelings of unsafety are understood and addressed, namely, the entwinement of policy and research; available policy ideas and solutions from countries with a social authority; local and national contexts, including the policy legacy; the institutional setting; and lastly, the language in which the problem is expressed and debated.

Knowledge and knowledge production are closely related to the formation of the meaning of a policy problem. Paper III illustrates the interdependence between policy and research. It argues that the policy problem of feelings of unsafety originates from the enumeration of ‘fear of crime’, and shows that the interpretation of the phenomenon of feelings of unsafety is constrained by that initial operationalization (in particular the interpretation of the negative correlation between the variables measuring ‘exposure to crime’ and ‘fear of crime’, i.e. the risk–fear paradox). Due to the entwinement of policy and research, the policy formation process is affected by constraints within the social sciences. In paper IV I argue that the research field of ‘fear of crime’ has been constrained by the primacy of longitudinal datasets and the cumulativity ideal, which has caused an ideational path dependency in operationalization and thus constrained the conceptualization and theoretical development. I show that, when breaking with that path dependency, the results point us in another direction. The results underline the importance of trustworthy public institutions, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where they seem to have a particularly strong potential to prevent feelings of unsafety.

Since policy and research are intertwined, researchers within this field are likewise affected by the developments within policy. Authorities and policy institutions (such as the Home Office in the United Kingdom, or BRÅ²⁰ and TMG²¹ in Sweden) have resources to do or to finance research, as well as to provide data through large-scale surveys. What re-

²⁰ The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention.

²¹ Tryggare och Mänskligare Göteborg/A safer and more humane Gothenburg.

search is funded and what data are collected not only affect the content of the authorities' discursive steering of policy practitioners but also affect the premises for knowledge production and thereby indirectly the knowledge claims that are made. In that sense, the discursive power of these authorities exceeds their intended and authorized steering range. Their influence over knowledge production creates an objectifying and legitimating feedback loop. Paper III shows that policy actors engaged in changing the understanding of the policy problem by strategically engaging in the selection and creation of knowledge. They thereby managed to question the dominant understanding of the policy problem. The strategy involved the inclusion of critical research(ers) as a means for questioning the dominant connection between unsafety and crime risk, and made possible a broader perception of the policy problem.

Another form of knowledge (in a broader sense) that has influenced the policy formation process in Sweden is that of policy practices and experiences of other countries. Papers I and II show that the understanding of feelings of unsafety in Swedish policy is influenced by transnational ideational trends originating from the United States and subsequently the United Kingdom. A particular understanding of the problem of feelings of unsafety has spread internationally through its encapsulation in a policy idea-complex containing a description of the problem and causal explanations as well as solutions (see section 2.1, paper I, II). The legitimacy of this particular interpretation is strengthened by the informal authority of the originating institutions (i.e. the US and UK policy institutions) (Røvik 2000). The central storylines of the idea-complex are also strengthened by affinities to broader societal interpretations (e.g. the crisis of democracy, the risk society), which strengthens its claims (papers II and III).

The universal nature of the claims of the policy idea-complex facilitates its ability to spread (Røvik 2000). However, it also provokes a contextualization of such claims as they are to be implemented. The representation of reality proposed by the transnational idea-complex invokes paradoxes, as it is reflected in the Swedish context (paper II). I argue that these paradoxes have triggered a sensemaking process for the policy actors, directed at covering the ruptures in meaning that these inconsistencies provoke. When (policy) actors engage in sensemaking they draw cues from frames (which could be theoretical, context specific, ideological) and thereby attach meaning to the phenomenon. What related frames are available is therefore a crucial formative factor. Theoretical and practical knowledge serve as such frames, but the frames also depend on the local context.

Paper II shows that, depending on the local context (socioeconomic and crime levels), different meanings are given to the problem of feelings of unsafety. Thus, the context shapes the understanding of the problem and how it is addressed. Another contextual factor that affects which aspects of the phenomenon are given attention and how those aspects are interpreted is the policy legacy. The institutionalized and historically dominating ways of understanding and addressing similar policy issues provide established frames to the sensemaking process. In paper I we find that the Swedish policy legacy affects the adaptation of crime preventive policy in Sweden. However, the ideational trend is moderated, rather than challenged.

In terms of institutional settings, it is also important with which institutions the problem is associated (e.g. whether it is perceived as a social problem or a security problem; as primarily a local problem or a national problem). The initial institutional embedding of a policy problem restricts the possibility of ascribing new meaning to the phenomenon (paper III). Different agencies have their cognitive frameworks and sets of assumptions. Thus, irrespective of the problem analysis, appointed agencies will seek solutions that square with their assignments and conceptions of what the problem is about (Gilling 1994: 251, paper III). While the lack of positive correlation between crime risk and fear gave rise to the policy problem of ‘fear of crime’, the lack of correlation would not be a paradox without the assumed relationship. Thus, the risk–fear paradox ties ‘the problem’ to crime,²² rather than to, for example, social vulnerability and control, or the attribution of blame. The connection to crime ascribes responsibility to certain institutions and actors, and thereby also restricts the available frames that attribute meaning to the problem of unsafety (see paper III).

Finally, I would like to emphasize the influence of the language in which the problem is addressed and deliberated (cf. Bauman 2000: 214). The word *otrygghet* [feelings of unsafety], which is used within the Swedish context, incites connotations that differ somewhat from the more specific *fear of crime* that is used within the anglophone context. The translation to the Swedish language opens up a broader understanding of the problem, by allowing a broader range of frames to give it meaning (see chapter

²² It does so by presuming that the feelings of unsafety that cannot be explained by risk of exposure to crime are unfounded and irrational. Thus, crime is upheld as the legitimate cause.

2). If feelings of unsafety are not foremost related to crime risk, then they could be taken to signify a broader set of insecurities or vulnerabilities.

To conceptualize the policy formation process as a sensemaking process implies that one take the actor as a starting point. The external factors, ideas and pressures that affect the content and direction of the policy are identified through the actors' sensemaking of the policy problem. By analysing what frames give meaning to the policy and what frames become marginalized, a closer account of the dynamics of policy change and continuity is possible. The interconnectedness between different policy field and different discourses (such as policy, social science and media) become apparent. As different discourses come to interact and support each other, an ideational path dependency may emerge (paper III). That is to say, once sense has started to appear, the attention is directed towards this particular perspective and incites the extraction of cues and frames that support the emerging picture (Weick 1995). When actors start to act in accordance with this particular understanding, feedback loops are initiated that come to reassert it. The strength of ideational path dependency comes from the entwinement of different discourses, as they come to affirm and strengthen each other. This explains why we have dominating ideological streams that tend to exert influence across policy fields and societal discourses, such as the neoliberal wave.

So how could policy ideations change? Discourses may change through dislocation, that is to say, a destabilization of a discourse due to events that cannot be explained and thereby integrated into the discourse (Torfing 1999). Discourses may be destabilized through the scrutiny of their inherent claims. However, a perhaps more crucial factor emphasized by sensemaking theory is action. Actions set the context that is to be made sense of. Actions direct attention and affect what frames are available. In the same way as actions may be guided by discursive claims and thereby come to affirm them, actions may intentionally or unintentionally challenge such claims. They may change the context and thereby lay ground for a destabilization of the discourse.

Many policy theories emphasize external shocks for explaining policy change (i.e. the Advocacy Coalition Framework, punctuated equilibrium theory and historical institutionalism). That shocks may trigger policy change is also consistent with the theoretical perspective elaborated in this thesis. A shock may change the context, redirect attention and provide new information and frames. A shock may thereby lead to a destabilization of the dominant discourse. However, since shocks are easily identifica-

ble, there is a risk of their becoming overemphasized as factors causing change. There are incremental processes of change that might be more difficult to identify and of which we have much less knowledge. My research suggests that there are constant processes of change (and continuity) (cf. Schmidt 2011). Policy actors may challenge the prevailing understanding of the problem. They may introduce or initiate alternative research into the debate. Even though an attempt to change policy has failed, the alternative articulations may have long-term effects (Weiss 1995:147). Alternative articulations may function as drops of water on sandstone. De Vries (2010) argued that fundamental policy change involves a shift in attention towards those aspects that have been the most neglected in previous policies. I suggest that such a shift may come as a consequence of repeated and amplified articulations of an alternative interpretation.

6.2 The broader implications for the governing of wicked problems

The second question concerns the broader implications of these studies, in particular, concerning the conditions for governing wicked problems. I will discuss the main implications and challenges of governing wicked problems that my results suggest. Three issues will be discussed in turn: first, the potential conflict between being context sensitive, on the one hand, and being able to address higher-level problems, on the other; second, the potential lock-in effects of institutional settings; and third, the need for transparency and reflexivity concerning knowledge claims.

6.2.1 Limitations of 'local solutions to local problems'

In the contemporary public administration practice and research there has lately been a focus on institutional and managerial arrangements for the governing of complex policy problems (O'Toole 1997, Klijn & Koopman 2000, Pollitt 2003, Christensen & Lægrend 2007, Sørensen & Torfing 2009, 2011). In this debate the main focus has been on organizational arrangements (generally on different forms of networks solutions). However, conceptual considerations concerning the problem at hand tend to be neglected, whereby the problem becomes represented as given. In this thesis I have argued that the understanding of a 'problem'/phenomenon has an intrinsic value dimension and that the process of defining a problem is political. As a problem becomes defined and institutionalized it

comes to shape actions and identities (March and Olsen 1998: 948), and its trajectory becomes constrained by mechanisms of path dependency (Pierson 2000, Torfing 2009, Pierre 2009, paper III). How a problem is defined and understood affects how a policy field is most suitably organized. However, I will argue that the institutional arrangement of a policy at the same time constrains the way the problem is understood. Hence, there is a recursive relationship between the definition of the problem and the institutional setting.

An important lesson from my research is that there is a potential conflict between being context sensitive through localized policies, and being able to define and address the problem on a higher level (paper II). A central aspect of defining wicked problems is to decide on which level the problem should be addressed, conceptually and institutionally. Since every wicked problem can be considered a symptom of another problem (Rittel & Webber 1973), it is possible to identify higher-level problems through backward mapping (Head & Alford 2008: 16). Feelings of unsafety could be seen as caused by crime, but also by inequality, gendered structures, failing institutions and so forth. These problems, in turn, could be seen as caused by higher-order problems, such as crime driven by poverty. Through such an exercise clusters may emerge from which key factors can be identified. In such mapping there is no right or wrong answer, in an absolute sense. However, solutions to wicked problems may be better or worse, from a normative perspective. ‘The map’ can therefore never be incontestable, or conclusively and objectively arrived at through more research (cf. Van Bueren *et al.* 2003).

The step that perhaps represents the most obvious ideational divide is whether the backward mapping stops at the level of individuals, or is taken further to identify structural factors that may explain individual behaviour. If a policy problem is defined at the level of individuals, the emphasis tends to fall on individual risk indicators and local expressions of, for example, crime. If the problem is defined at a structural level, processes and structural interaction (e.g. intersectionality [Crenshaw 1991]) become emphasized. Social scientific theories are generally based on presumptions of the primacy of structural versus individual factors, which means that the knowledge claims that they produce reinforce such assumptions. Thus, the social sciences may not resolve such issues.

Public safety policy is shaped by the credo ‘local solutions to local problems’ (Gilling 2001, paper I, II) and is generally managed in multi-agency networks to join up government at local level (Hughes 1998, cf. Christen-

sen & Læg Reid 2007). On a commonsense level the idea that policies should be adapted to the specific context may seem uncontroversial. Indeed, paper IV shows that there are aspects of social phenomena (in this case, feelings of unsafety) that we miss if we only consider the aggregate level. However, local solutions to local problems also imply a decentralization of responsibility and blame (which implies that some localities are freed from responsibility).

If responsibility for an issue such as crime and disorder is localized, that limits the possible levels at which the problem can be addressed, which is particularly constraining for segregated, disadvantaged localities. Paper II shows that the civil servants at local level engage in backward mapping as a part of their sensemaking process. What is more, they stop at different levels. The policy actors in the most disadvantaged municipality go back the furthest and point to structural problems that are argued to induce exclusion, crime and 'disorder'. However, while the policy actors in that municipality may define the root problem as segregation, individualized responsibility or unequal opportunity, those are not issues that they are able to address at the local level. Paper II thereby illustrates that localized institutional arrangements may constrain the possibilities for changing the understanding of the problem and treating it at another level.

Another example can be taken from the analysis in paper IV, which shows that trust in public institutions is the most important factor²³ for feelings of safety for those living in Vivalla (a segregated, disadvantaged neighbourhood). For those living in Örebro city, the variables with a unique effect on feelings of unsafety are the usual suspects: gender, age and education, together with generalized trust. Yet, even though the result, that trustworthy institutions are particularly important for (feelings of) safety in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, was taken as a policy criterion at the local level, the local authorities alone would not be able to alter the current trend of dismantling public institutions in such areas. A decision to strengthen local authorities would demand a priority in terms of financial resources between different localities and would thereby have to be initiated at a higher institutional level.

To sum up, local problems may be expressions of broader structural factors. However, that perspective tends to become neglected when policy is localized. In addition, the idea of decentralized network governance of complex policy issues, such as social inclusion or feelings of unsafety,

²³ Of those included in the analysis.

tends to build on a consensus rhetoric, whereby ideological conflicts are neglected and regarded as passé (Bogdanor 2005, Davies 2009). The current management discourse encourages the management of symptoms, while rejecting societal goals (such as the class-less society of Marxism). It thereby suffers from a lack of direction and a higher-order framework, which tend to keep the definitions of problems at an individual level.

6.2.2 Problematizing the multi-agency network approach

At the policy conferences studied in this thesis (paper III) a recurring theme was the need to diminish the silo mentality of public authorities. It was even held to be the single most important issue for governing feelings of unsafety (see quote, chapter 2). Cooperation and coordination among different actors (such as the police, local authorities, school, real estate owners and local businesses) are at the core of policy initiatives on fear of crime and unsafety in Sweden, as well as in other countries (Gilling 1994, Hughes 1998, Edwards & Hughes 2005). The contemporary public administration literature tends to identify networks as the most suitable way of governing wicked problems (Klijn & Koppenjan 2000, Van Bueren *et al.* 2003, Sørensen & Torfing 2009). Indeed, network governance even tends to be projected as a panacea. However, it has also been argued that well-defined organizational boundaries remain important (Pollitt 2003: 39). There are reasons to problematize the idea of horizontal network governance, in particular, as its suitability for governing wicked problems has become somewhat of a truism.

The idea of multi-agency collaboration assumes a consentient understanding of the problem and its causes. However, networks coordinate the work of local policy actors that may be part of different institutional worlds, directed by divergent cognitive frameworks (Gilling 1994, Davies 2009). Apart from divergent institutional discourses, these local actors have different assignments and accountabilities that prohibit them from redefining the problem, especially as a second-order problem, which may be outside their own assignments and their legitimate range of action. The analysis of the policy formation process of public safety policy in Sweden (paper III) shows that the policy problem received a broader interpretation when the nature of the problem was discussed freely. When interventions were considered, the meaning of the policy problem shifted towards the tangible and the measured, and to fit the general assignments of particular authorities. Thus, civil servants translate a problem to fit their particular assignment and identify remedies that are within their authoritative range.

If feelings of unsafety are to be addressed by physical planners, it is already implied that the physical environment is causing the problem, while other aspects become excluded. Another aspect is that the implementing institutions emphasized solutions. 'Best practices' and other 'certified' solutions gain precedence in the name of efficiency, which explains why the international transfer of policy solutions may come to precede the identification of the problem they are meant to solve.

It is questionable whether the attraction of collaboration comes from the inducement that the idea of collaboration provokes, or from a sincere attempt to arrive at a common understanding of a problem (Gilling 1994). Fashionable though vague concepts, such as social cohesion, safety or sustainability, allow for divergent interests to unite under a common conceptual umbrella, without too much compromise. Such mobilization may be beneficial through the allocation of attention and resources to the policy field (cf. Rein 2006). It is likewise questionable whether contemporary wicked problems are more complex than the policy issues, such as unemployment or poverty reduction, governed by the second-generation policy fields, apart from the increasing global interconnectedness. Could these issues, if defined at a higher level, be either incorporated into existing policy fields or defined as more independent policy issues?

Policy coordination (also referred to as multi-agency governance, joined-up government, or whole-of-government) can be seen as a reaction to the streamlining of public institutions in the name of New Public Management, during the last decades of the 20th century (Pollitt 2003). The streamlining of public institutions directs their priorities towards performing in their core assignments, leaving broader, horizontal assignments unattended. In this light, joined-up government could be seen as an attempt to cover the deserted space that this development has created between the assignments of different authorities (cf. Christensen & Lægread 2007).

Joined-up government can be seen as an attempt to coordinate different authorities and their interventions by means of a common conceptual framework and problem definition. However, a joint direction could come to streamline the perspectives and assignments of different authorities, so that one approach, for example, risk management, becomes dominant. Central to policy networks are performance indicators, such as the measurement of fear of crime/feelings of unsafety. Implicit in this performance measurement is an understanding of the problem, which connects feelings of unsafety to crime risk (paper III). That particular framing of the issue

receives an exceptional position, affecting which authorities and actors are involved, as well as their relative positions. Meanwhile, it excludes other institutional frames and possible interpretations of the problem (paper III). Thus, again, there is a recursive relationship between problem definition and institutional arrangements.

6.2.3 A call for transparency and reflexivity concerning knowledge claims

One of the main arguments in this thesis is that knowledge production and policy are entwined processes, and as such, have formative effects on each other. So, what does this imply for the actors and institutions that govern wicked problems?

The argument implies that it is not possible to identify social problems and find their proper solutions in an objective sense by means of social science (cf. Flyvbjerg 2001). Social problems are not matters of objective fact but of disputed values and divergent knowledge claims (Stone 1997). The governing of wicked problems is therefore always political and should be recognized as such. Since the objectivist nature of research tends to conceal its basic propositions, policy actors as well as researchers should be attentive to the power inherent in such claims (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012). This calls for an awareness of the value claims inherent in problem definitions as well as in research findings that take such definitions as a starting point (see e.g. Fischer 2003).

Authorities that are assigned to govern wicked problems tend to have the assessment, production and dissemination of knowledge as central tasks. I have argued that the idea of governing through knowledge at a bureaucratic level relies on an objectivist perception of knowledge. Through the legitimating chimera of knowledge claims, and causal claims in particular (Stone 1989), the value dimension of such practices is obscured. In addition, a bureaucratization of policy formation also implies that the construction of meaning of a particular phenomenon is constrained by the institutional framework and appointed actors, as argued in the previous section.

So, are there alternative modes for governing wicked problems that would lessen the constraints on the policy formation process and allow for a more reflexive relationship between policy and research? A growing academic debate is concerned with the substantial discrepancy between the dominant arguments within social scientific disciplines, and those of the contemporary public discourse (Flyvbjerg 2001, Burawoy 2005, Ericson 2005, Loader & Sparks 2010). There is a wide acknowledgement that the

interface between policy and research is in need of vitalization and should preferably be more argumentative (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003). A crucial factor for such an alternative arrangement is that the definition of the problem not be preconceived (cf. Hajer 1995), and the available frames that may give it meaning not be restricted.²⁴ What is needed is an institutional arrangement that allows for a reflexive construction of the problem. The process of defining and addressing wicked policy problems demands an organization that can process considerable amounts of information, extract multiple cues and handle uncertainty (cf. Weick 2001: ch 21). This does not imply that the social sciences should have a diminished role in policy formation. On the contrary, it calls for a more active though altered role that may accentuate the value dimension of policy problems, rather than obscure it. The social sciences could thereby provide guidance for political, normative debate (cf. Flyvbjerg 2012).²⁵

To recognize the inherent values in policy as well as research and reject the objectivistic knowledge view does not necessitate the surrender to relativism, a position where every interpretation is treated as equal. The reliability of an argument can be determined by its inherent logic and the appropriateness of its application through normative debate. Neither does it imply a rejection of traditionally positivist methods. Different methodological approaches (such as single case studies, quantitative studies, evaluative studies or experimental studies) may complement each other. The condition is that they join in a common discussion where different contributions may be related to each other based on their value presumptions and propositions.

Through the conceptualization of policy formation as a sensemaking process I have illustrated mechanisms that prohibit reflexivity within policy formation. In striving for clarity and consistent storylines, causal claims, numbers and straightforward results are functional. Policy ideas gain strength from building on claims of a generalized character (cf. Røvik 2000). These mechanisms may constitute the greatest challenge for inter-

²⁴ This is, of course, principally unachievable, but may serve as a goal.

²⁵ One way of arranging such a process would be through inquiries (Hajer 1995, Torgerson 2003). Public inquiries could allow for a structured, open and reflexive interface between policy and science, which could be informed by the voices of affected (and generally excluded) groups. However, in a Swedish context large-scale inquiries with a high degree of autonomy and broad participation have become rare (Amnå 2010). Thus, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction.

pretive research and the call for a reflexive policy formation process. In addition, normative debate is a concern that tends to be neglected and concealed by the current managerialist and objectivist discourse.

Thus, the quest for a reflexive policy formation process is a challenge that may require patience. However, there are trends that indicate that opportunity for change may be arising. As mentioned, there is a growing acknowledgement within the social sciences that the interface between policy and research is in need of vitalization, in particular, concerning values and core presumptions. This debate involves a discussion on how this end could be advanced through adaptation on behalf of the social sciences (Flyvbjerg 2001, Burawoy 2005, Ericson 2005, Loader & Sparks 2010). There has also been considerable theoretical development concerning the co-production of policy and research (perhaps most notably by Latour 1987, and Jasanoff 2004, 2012), which challenges the assumption of research as value neutral and as being independent from the policy stream. Meanwhile, the interpretive school is growing, and the argumentative turn within policy studies has been substantial (see e.g. Fischer & Forester 1993, Fisher & Gottweis 2012a). Within the policy practice we witness a growing interest for deliberative practices (though with divergent reference to a deliberative ideal). While values and explicit ideology have been neglected during the last decades there seems to be a growing urge for such perspectives (which is being exploited by nationalist parties). Together, these developments may come to affect the character of the public debate in such a direction (cf. De Vries 2010).

There is a need for a vital, continuous deliberation concerning values and the priorities among different values, as well as the scrutiny of their influence on how political and social institutions work. As policy formation implies a constant striving to reduce complexity, we need to resist mechanisms that constrain the understanding of policy problems. The possibility of resolving, and not only managing, wicked problems may enlarge as a result.

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