

REGNET PROGRAM REVIEW 2001-2006

IMPACT CASE STUDY: VICTORIA POLICE - SECURITY

RegNet in its short history (it began in 2001) has emerged, and is widely recognized as, a world leader in theory and research on developments in contemporary governance, and its structures of regulation. RegNet's work is creating policy and practice that is more effective and more just. RegNet's empirically informed theory-building has been used in many different fields and in many different parts of the world to promote better policy as well as more effective and just practices of governance - human rights, health, environment occupational safety, restorative justice, peacekeeping and peace building, the regulation of knowledge, taxation and policy in Australia, the Pacific, Asia, the Americas (north and south) and Africa. Theory matters and RegNet's research and theory-building (both explanatory and normative) is having an Australian, as well as a global, impact.

Fruits of our research partnership with Victoria Police

In the case to follow we trace the impact of RegNet's theory-building in the field of security – a profoundly important domain of governance/regulation in our increasingly insecure contemporary world. This impact covers many different arenas of security governance that includes the emerging threat areas of terrorism and cybercrime. The focus here will be on the profound impact that RegNet is having on policing in Australia through transformation initiated by the police in the State of Victoria.

The concepts and theories that RegNet scholars have developed in their analyses of security governance have been influential in the development of new policies, practices and legislation in Australia and beyond. A central concept is that of 'nodal governance', which provides a framework for understanding shifts in the ways in which security goods are sponsored, delivered and regulated at local, national and global levels. It also provides a framework for thinking normatively about more effective and democratic ways of linking the knowledge, capacity and resources of various policing and security governance institutions. Both these explanatory and normative lines of inquiry have influenced the thinking of practitioners and policy-makers whose job it is to make sense of new threats to security in the 21st century – ranging from crime and disorder to organized crime and terrorism – and to craft new institutions and programs designed to meet these challenges. While what follows will focus on Australian impact it is worth noting that these ideas have shaped policing and security delivery internationally. For example, the recommendations of Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland (the Patten Commission) explicitly adopted a nodal approach to security.

Victoria Police, as part of its new 'service delivery' principles has adopted a nodal framework. Much of this rethinking has been taking place with the support of one of RegNet's centres – Security 21: International Centre for Security and Justice – through the 'Nexus Policing' Project funded by Victoria Police and the Australian Research Council. The goal of the Nexus Project is to explore and develop innovative ways of linking the knowledge and capacities of Victoria Police and non-government agencies, community based organisations, the business sector, and citizens in a coordinated approach to delivering increased community safety. Strategic models for developing new nexus arrangements – comprising connections and links between people and processes – have been, or are currently being developed in 7 areas: youth safety, post-release management of sex offenders in community settings, investigation and management of family violence cases, safety on the public transportation system, safety in and around public housing estates, safety for indigenous communities and safety for young and multicultural communities.

One of these projects is focused on one of Australia's most precious groups, its young school-going children. The use of nodal theory by Victoria Police, the Department of Education and the Wodonga Municipality has produced surprising research findings with respect to the vulnerabilities of children and what they can contribute to finding and implementing governance solutions. The project has developed a youth safety governance model that is being adopted and rolled out by schools across Victoria within an overall restorative justice orientation – another key area of RegNet theoretical leadership globally.

In addition to the 7 pilot projects – which draw on a nodal governance methodology for 'mapping' and assessing policing arrangements – Victoria Police has developed strategies in two operational areas – organized crime and road safety – that were shaped by a nodal governance perspective. During 2004, in an attempt to understand the nature of the organised crime problem in Victoria, a nodal methodology of mapping and research led directly to the design of a new Organised Crime Strategy. The research findings were used to support the ERC Business Case applications for Government funding. At the outset of this research, a member of the Organised Crime Strategy Project Team spent some time at RegNet to learn about nodal governance theory and to seek guidance from Security 21 academics.

The Victoria Police Road Policing Strategy (released May 2006) also employs a nodal mapping approach. Opportunities to improve road policing effectiveness and responses by mapping resources and capacities, including how these are best linked both internally and externally, have resulted in a new nodal approach to service delivery.

The result of the Nexus Project, as in the case of the Patten Commission's recommendations, has been a broad shift in thinking within Victoria Police, and organizations they work with, that reflects a nodal conception of governance. This shift will have an effect across the domain of policing and security within Australia, and elsewhere, as police and other governance institutions seek out 'best practice'.

This Victorian work, and the nodal framework it adopts, has counterparts in work that is being undertaken, with Security 21 support, by the Australian Federal Police as well as in policing transformations that have taken place in Argentina, and that are taking place in Brazil, South Africa and Uganda. RegNet makes a difference.