

Summary

This thesis is based on a qualitative, exploratory study which focuses on the Nordic liaison officer's role in international police cooperation. Based on in-depth interviews with eight liaison officers on how they perceive their work, we have tried to describe what they actually do, how they perform their duties, and why such positions exist in the police.

Over the years the perception of crime has evolved from being considered as a local issue into a global phenomenon. This point of view has led to an increased police presence in the international arena. As a result of this development, numerous international law enforcement agencies such as Interpol and Europol have been created (Bowling & Sheptycki, 2012, p.1). This evolution raises questions about the role of the police on the international scene.

The execution of power and authority conducted by the police is something that is clearly limited to the national states own jurisdictions. Consequently problems are encountered when the need for intervention is extended beyond their own national borders. This is further complicated by varied structures within police organizations throughout the world, cultural differences, language barriers, different legal framework, lack of trust, state sovereignty and the obligation to protect own citizens. This rugged terrain demands for a great need of guidance.

The Nordic liaison officers are police and customs officers that are stationed outside the Nordic countries through the Nordic police and customs cooperation (PTN). They act as the point of contact between the Nordic countries and the law enforcement authorities in the host country. Their role represents a modern and specialized police which is different from what is associated with the role of traditional police. They have no formal jurisdiction and their work relies on permission and cooperation with authorities in the host country (Block, 2008, p 77).

We assume that the liaison officer's role consists of doing something for someone, and furthermore getting others to do something for them. For this reason we describe them as the "man in the middle ". We also assume that the role can be divided into two main dimensions.

The first one is that they act as advisors who provide comprehensive knowledge on how police cooperation can take place across national borders. The second is that they are facilitators for stakeholders to find each other in order to exchange information.

In order to be successful with international police cooperation, the Nordic liaison officers are highlighting presence, network, efficiency and trust as crucial factors. The unique position that they hold in relation to these factors explains in many ways why they are considered to be a successful instrument in international police cooperation (see for example Bigo, 2000; den Boer, 2010; Kleven, 2010b). However, our study shows that it is necessary to nuance this picture. Some indications such as lack of knowledge about their work, limited access to cases and that they seem to work on tasks that could be referred to other international agencies, point at an untapped potential of exploiting the instrument that the Nordic liaison officers represent. There is also room for improvement when it comes to the organization of the Nordic liaison officer's service in Norway and in the Nordic countries, in order to further exploit the support and service they can provide.

In light of the barriers that the police are facing when they cooperate in the international arena we think that the image of the Nordic liaison officers as "oil in the machine" provides a good illustration of their role in international police cooperation.