

From Integration to Contact

A Community Policing Reform?

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the reform named *nærpolitireformen*, literally translated “the near police reform” in Norway. There is a wide gap between the political retorics talking about community policing and the reality, that is bigger centralized units. The article analyses the solutions suggested to make the police local; the police contacts, police Councils and the SLT. It asks does these measures make the police local and what sort of police will we get after the reform?

Keywords

Police reform, community policing, crime prevention, police contacts

“The consequences of geographical centralization for the police role can be characterized as a choice between a police integrated in local communities or a police being dispatched to such communities.” (Vestby 2012; VI, author’s translation).

The reform of the Norwegian police that was later renamed “the Community Policing Reform (*nærpolitireformen*)”¹ by the Norwegian Parliament (*Stortinget*) started out as anything but a plan for a police based in local communities. The two recent reforms – Police Reform 2000 and the Community Policing Reform – rest on quite different ideals: efficiency, large districts, strong operational capabilities, improved investigation, uniformity, specialization, and stronger oversight and control have been in focus. These ideas are clearly stated in the white paper outlining the reform (NOU 2013: 9) and in the Police Reform 2000 (St. meld. 22 [2000–2001]).

The change of name happened during the process of gathering political support for the reform (Prop. 61 LS (2014–2015)). The reform was draped in a rhetoric and given goals that

1. There is an irony here that seems to be lost on most commentators: 20 years ago, Sweden embarked on a reform that centralized the police and had many similarities to the recent one in Norway, both in ideals and practice. The Swedish reform was called the *Community Policing Reform*.

hardly existed in the original white paper. The need for local police presence was augmented, and the 10 principles for the Norwegian Police were revived. Such seemingly conflicting messages – the need for centralization and efficiency in order to create a police with a strong local affiliation – is not unique to Norway; the same arguments are found in Sweden and Denmark, and in The Netherlands and Scotland (Fyfe, Terpstra & Tops 2013; Dijk, Hoogewoning & Punch 2015).²

The gap between political ideas and actual reality is nothing new. To observers of the Norwegian police, it has often been difficult to understand what was happening, as the number of media consultants and communication staff has continued to rise in recent years. Information from the police and other authorities has been unambiguous (Holgersson 2015): The reforms (and they are plural) are necessary and there are no viable alternatives. The image projected to the public is that of a police force agreeing on the necessary processes of change, neglecting the (often rather strong) discontent of the rank and file (Politiforum February 2017).

The current reform falls into two parts: a structural reform aiming to free up resources for specific core tasks of the police, and a quality reform aiming at creating an evidence-based police force (NOU 2017:9). Still, the salient features of the reform are centralization and structural reform, if in a rather broad sense. It seems quite surprising that such features are presented as the solution to the problems the police face in the twenty-first century, since evaluations of police performance, e.g. concerning the terror attack in Oslo and Utøya in 2011 (Gjørvrappporten) suggest improvement of police culture and leadership (NOU 2012: 14). The structural reforms first reduced the number of police districts from 27 to 12, and afterwards, the number of local police entities fell from 354 to about 225. This latter reduction, in particular, begs the question: How can this be seen as a reform promoting community policing?

The present paper will discuss what suggestions, models, and ideas have been promoted as the means to create a local police in a time where local police units have been shut down. The responsibility for creating a police in close proximity to local communities is now placed at the district level, and the Police Directorate³ has asked for input from the districts about how to implement the reform. One can identify clear similarities in the adaptations suggested by the districts. This is hardly surprising, since models for local cooperation, such as *SLT* (local crime prevention cooperation councils) and police/community councils, in which the police are important participants, already exist in most municipalities. The paper ends with a discussion about what kind of police we will see in the future, and what role community policing is likely to play.

METHOD

The paper is based mainly on the different suggestions sent from police districts to the national police administration. These suggestions (Advice on the new local structure from

2. NOU is an acronym for Norges Offentlige Utredninger (basically official white papers on different subjects), St. meld. means Stortingsmelding (reports to the parliament).
3. The Police Directorate is the national authority in charge of the police. It is headed by a National Commissioner (Politidirektør).

district police chiefs [*Politimestrenes tilråkning til ny lokal struktur*]) can be found on the home page of the Norwegian police.⁴

Suggestions include advice about how to structure the new, large districts and how to maintain a local police affiliation when local units have been closed down, while others deal with questions concerning proximity and crime prevention.

The contributions vary in quality, depth, and volume: Some seem to be promoting the “correct message” (that is, supporting the official ideas of the reform), while others are more analytical, raising questions concerning the reform. They bear witness to varying experiences and realities in the districts. Still, they are important as a data source, since they tell us what the districts find important concerning prevention, organization and community policing. They reflect signals and information received from the Police Directorate, the Ministry of Justice, and the political authorities concerning the reform. Thus, they cannot be read only as descriptions of actual conditions in the districts, neither present nor future.

The reform has generated an intensive public debate, but, curiously, the question of how the police can remain close to the communities they serve has been almost completely neglected. Neither did this occupy a prominent place in the discussions surrounding Police Reform 2000 or in the work leading up to the Community Policing Reform: it was only mentioned in discussions about plans for cooperation with outside agencies. The actual white paper (NOU 2013: 9) does not mention the concepts of local or community policing at all – they are not themes in the proposal. The paper focusses on future challenges, and they are not local: they are international, they are mobile, they are organized, and they are online. Problems may arise almost anywhere – except in local communities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two important points regarding the historical context need to be clarified: Norway, as other industrialized countries, has experienced centralization and urbanization for decades (Furuhagen 2009). This has affected the police; there has been a reduction in police entities and an increased reliance on motorized patrol. However, in the 1970s there was a reaction. There was a movement in the opposite direction – pulling the police toward decentralization and local participation (Larsson 2005). In 1976, a committee was given the task of defining the role and tasks of police in the society– their first results were published in 1981 (NOU 1981: 35). This publication – defining 10 core principles of Norwegian policing – has served as a pivotal reference ever since (St. meld. [2004–2005]). The principles put a high value on proximity and interaction with the citizenry, and they reinforced the idea of community policing in the years to come.

The controversies regarding centralization must also be understood in the light of the fact that tension between town and country has remained one of the most important political and cultural divisions in Norway for the last 150 years. This division can be seen in, e.g. the referendums on membership of the EU in 1972 and 1994 – both ended with a no after massive mobilization in rural areas – the Prohibition Era 1916–27, where the temperance

4. https://www.politi.no/nyhet_16548.xml

movement stood strong in rural villages, and, more recently, in battles over subjects like municipal reform and whether or not to allow wolves to roam the countryside. Often, what is considered ‘genuinely Norwegian’ is associated with rural life far from the big cities, and strong political forces have been characterized by dissociation from industrialization and city life. There has never been a real break with these currents. Economic and cultural development have pulled the country towards urbanization, centralization, and the slow draining of rural villages while public rhetoric and ideals continue to emphasize that the good life is to be found in local communities in rural areas. An open clash with – and breaking away from – the ideals from NOU (1981) did not come about until the Police Analysis of 2013. This breach was then reversed in the spring of 2015, when the politicians distanced themselves from the wording of the analysis while at the same time continuing to support the solutions presented in it. In Norway, centralization of the police is often interpreted in line with loss of other public services and institutions such as railway stations, post offices, rural schools and local businesses. The deterioration of local political control of the police (an important issue in continental Europe) has not been much of an issue.

FRAMES AND RHETORIC

The debate concerning the reform has – especially since 2015 – been characterized by contradictory messages. The reform is presented as the solution to a host of different problems. It is possible to identify two core messages, one from the political level concerning policy, the other concerning the perspective of police management on organization, control and development of police methods.

The policy is expressed in propositions, agreements, and goal definitions describing the political vision that evolved from the compromises around the reform. The views of police management can be found in the Police Analysis and in the communication from the Police Directorate: the magazine Norwegian Police (*Norsk Politi*), the web site politi.no, and statements from the Director of Police. Especially the latter present a clear idea of what the central police management think about the reform.

In its initial evaluation, Difi (2017)⁵ emphasizes that the political leadership has used the Ministry of Justice to maintain a very tight control over the way in which the Police Directorate has implemented the reform. Arguably, due to very concrete goals for the reform set by the political level, the Police Directorate has had very limited freedom to design the reform, and the final result is a kind of amalgamation of demands, wishes – and what is actually possible.⁶

The policy is formulated most clearly in the overall goals of the Community Policing Reform stated in Proposition⁷ 61 LS (2014–2015):

5. Difi is an acronym for Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT (Agency for Public Administration and eGovernment)
6. Tension between the political level and daily police administration is nothing new. Since the establishment of the Police Directorate in 2001, tensions have arisen on several occasions. The increasing political importance of symbolic policy areas such as criminal justice, and intense media scrutiny has led to a number of instances where political leaders have interfered quite directly in the management of the police.
7. A proposition to the parliament.

A community police that is operational, visible, and accessible, and that has the capabilities to prevent, investigate, and enforce criminal acts and the capability to safeguard the security of the citizens. A competent and efficient community police organization should be developed where people live. Simultaneously, robust specialist departments – ready to meet the crime challenges of today and tomorrow – must be constructed.⁸

This formulation can also be found in an agreement between the political parties Fremskrittspartiet and Venstre (17/2–2015): “Agreement between the government parties about the foundation for a robust community police with a view to the future”. As is readily apparent, the agreement pulls in two opposite directions: a localized community police *and* a police with capacity, competence, efficiency, and robust specialist departments. The formulations leave the reader with the impression that efficient, competent, local, and robust police do not exist, but must be created.

The Ministry of Justice and the Police Directorate have split the overall objectives into six parts:

1. A more *accessible and present* police, anchored in and cooperating with local communities;
2. A more uniform police, delivering the *same level of services with improved quality across the country*;
3. A police that has a *clearer focus* on prevention, investigation, and a force ready for deployment;
4. A police with *improved competences and capacity*, sharing knowledge and able to learn from experience;
5. A police that gets better results in a *culture of openness and trust* through good management and employee involvement;
6. A police that *works more efficiently* by utilizing better methods and new technology.⁹

“A broad range of developmental measures will be undertaken in order to secure that the goals of the Community Policing Reform will be met. They can be divided into four main areas:

- The police will be reorganized;
- Management and control must be strengthened;
- The police need to develop new and better ways of working;
- Police work must be supported by new and better technologies”.¹⁰

Despite the fact that reform plans from the outset were broad and ambitious, structural reform has been the central issue. Considerable efforts have been made to develop working methods and technical solutions. The media has focused on juxtaposing centralization and budget cuts with the fact that the reform is supposed to renew *community* policing. On several occasions, the National Police Commissioner, Odd Reidar Humlegård, has presen-

8. This and all consecutive quotes from the Norwegian translated by the author.

9. www.politi.no

10. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-61-s-2014-2015/id2398784/>

ted the closing of local police units as a positive development, and one necessitated by an inevitable drive towards modernization and efficiency improvement:

‘This is a historic day. We have never undertaken a reform of this magnitude, and we will never do it again. Never before have so many local police stations been closed at the same time. This is a huge clean up that has taken its time, since we have had so many small and vulnerable police units,’ says Humlegård.

‘This is our chance of renewing the police. I feel a great responsibility to make it work. The ambition around the country, from the smallest sheriff’s office (*lensmannskontor*) to the Police Directorate, is to deliver better and more uniform police service all over the country,’ says Humlegård (*author’s translation*).¹¹

For the National Commissioner, a local police is no goal in itself – he is concerned with increasing efficiency and uniformity. Here, the idea of local policing means accessibility, mobility, “out of the office”, and presence on the web. “I want a mobile and accessible police. We must get out of the office, into the patrol cars, and out to the people. With the use of available modern technology, we will solve the public’s problems on the spot, says Odd Reidar Humlegård” (VG 10-10-2013, *author’s translation*).

POLICE CONTACTS AND CONFERENCE-POLICE

The aims and goals described above create a framework that, combined with existing resources, limits the possibilities individual districts have to carry out their duties. So what solutions are proposed?

The police districts make it clear that prevention must be either the main strategy, be strengthened, or at least be one of the most important parts of the new strategy. Crime prevention, however, is not defined, and the strategies presented differ quite a lot, even though some shared elements are identifiable. Central units manned by experts in crime prevention will be established: “Now we are creating larger units that will enable professionalization and increase competence” (Police District East). Several districts emphasize that it will be possible to increase the number of officers working with prevention. Such prevention officers will have a plethora of different tasks, and quite a few of the tasks relating to contact and coordination¹² undertaken by the police will be handled them.

Prevention specialists will also maintain cooperation with SLT (municipal crime prevention councils), police–citizen councils and the police contacts (described in detail in a subsequent part of the paper). The districts of Møre and Romsdal highlight the importance of cooperation between district and local POs. The central POs will be the specialists overseeing the local prevention initiatives, while the practical prevention will “mainly be the task of local police”.

Due to the fact that crime prevention can cover almost any kind of police work, they emphasize that the work must be goal-oriented, long-term, and managed strategically. “It is a goal of the Community Policing Reform that police crime prevention efforts must be

11. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/vil-legge-ned-126-av-politiets-tjenestesteder-1.13320667>

12. Such tasks include, among others, the combatting of radicalization, promoting diversity, coordinating traffic control and coordinating police activities countering domestic violence.

intelligence-led and goal-oriented; the work must be based on crime analysis and knowledge about local conditions” (Police District Vest, *author’s translation*). “By creating larger preventive units we will achieve a *professionalization and a higher level of competence* enabling the police to work in a more structured fashion and be more target-oriented” (PD Øst, *author’s translation*). Several PDs express the wish that preventive units will establish their own formal leadership referring directly to the district management. Traditionally, crime prevention has dealt exclusively with children and juveniles (Larsson 2005), but recently it has been extended to virtually any kind of crimes. According to PD Agder, this expansion has not been easy: “Our district is concentrating our preventive efforts on children and juveniles, drugs, and traffic. Regarding other kinds of problems, it is a challenge for our PD to act in a proactive and preventive fashion” (*author’s translation*).

“Prevention is defined as one of the most important police tasks. In fact, prevention should guide all police action. It is therefore paramount for the Community Policing Reform to maintain our focus on preventive policing” (PD Øst, *author’s translation*). “In the future organization, crime prevention must cut across all departmental boundaries” (PD Vest, *author’s translation*). Of further interest is the fact that some PDs tie intelligence to prevention; traditionally intelligence has mainly been associated with investigation of crimes. It is the aim to create “close ties between intelligence and prevention in order to discover criminal communities and establish preventive efforts”.¹³

THE POLICE CONTACT

“The Police Contacts will play an important role in the efforts of Trøndelag PD to reach the goals of the district and the Community Policing Reform” (Trøndelag PD).

The Police Contact (PC) is mentioned for the first time in the government agreement between the two governing parties of February 2015. The formulation from the agreement is repeated almost verbatim in Proposition 61 (2014–2015): “Each municipality has at least one dedicated contact person at the sheriff’s office [*lensmannskontoret*] or the police station (Police Contact). The Police Contact assists the police council in the PC’s municipality/municipalities and functions as a point of contact for all preventive work in the district”.

The concept of contact points is already mentioned in a white paper from 2001 (St. meld. 22 (2000–2001)). The white paper also stressed the importance of proximity¹⁴ between the police and the public, but it was clear that it was no longer seen as self-evident that the police maintain permanent units or stations locally.¹⁵ “Safe communities are created through a broad cooperation regarding local prevention. Close contact between police and communities is a prerequisite for effective prevention and crime control. [] When

13. This has been mentioned also in the “intelligence doctrine” written by the Police Directorate (Politidirektoratet 2014).

14. the Norwegian word *nærpoliti* is not easy to translate, it can be said it is a proximity: near- or local police. The main idea is in closeness, cooperation and shared values and lifeworld. So it points not only to a physical but also a normative aspect of closeness.

15. “When evaluating the police service offered in the future, the Ministry of Justice finds it natural to think about new localities such as municipal centers, smaller stations/units, or contact points replacing existing police localities” (St. Meld. 22, 4.2.2).

working together with municipalities and others, the police may share offices in order to carry out local tasks, such as the Police Contacts (OT prop. 2014–2015, 11.4.1).

The role of the PC is to develop contacts and networks: “Police Contacts must work in uniform, and they must be present in their municipalities at least once a week. They must maintain a predictable schedule and follow up on all agreements between the police and the municipality. PCs are supposed to be officers with a broad experience from different kinds of police work, not least crime prevention, which will be their special responsibility”.¹⁶

According to the magazine *Norsk Politi*, the PCs must “utilize police technology in a systematic way in order to keep track of preventive tasks” and they must “communicate these to the rest of the police and to current co-operators in the municipality” (*Norsk Politi*, issue 4, 2016: 23). They must also work with crime prevention officers in their district and, in larger departments, also function as contacts to local businesses and agents working to prevent radicalization. Clearly, PCs are supposed to carry out a plethora of tasks connected to communication and meetings.

Much of what police districts write about the PC function reflects and supports the signals from the political level. The main agenda of a PC is prevention and the building of networks. The mandate of the PC is to be defined in close cooperation with the municipality, and there is ample room for experiments: “Since this role is a new one, it will be necessary to rely on trial and error in order to find out how best to use this function to help the police carry out their duties” (PD Trøndelag).

A point of special interest is the relationship between PCs and the operational officers, since the PCs are not supposed to be working in the field themselves. “The PC must keep a close watch on the community policing aspect of the police role. Officers in the field must cooperate with the PC as a way to be connected to prevention efforts”. A somewhat cryptic formulation states that “The PC shall have the authority to oblige the police within its area of responsibility”.

The district of Trøndelag has some practical experience with PCs, and their suggestions are the most elaborate. They list a number of functions for PCs to maintain, among them to take responsibility for preventive activities, and to make sure that the police follow up recommendations from SLT and local police councils. They also suggest that PCs form a group in order to improve their skills and competency.

POLICE COUNCILS AND SLT

The idea of police councils is not a new one – it was mentioned in NOU (1981: 35), but the first such council wasn’t established until 2007. “A police council is a collaborative forum between local police and municipal authorities, and its goal is to contribute to crime prevention and building safe communities (Politidirektoratet 2012: 4).

“The political platform of the majority government emphasizes police councils as an important way of preventing crime. The government wants to use police councils as a means to involve local politicians and make them responsible. The goal is to develop a strategic

16. https://www.politi.no/politidirektoratet/aktuelt/nyhet_16579.xhtml

cooperation concerning crime prevention with local authorities and to secure that municipalities and the police share information and experience. Police councils may also help reach the goal of a locally anchored police” (Prop. 1.S [2011–2012]: 99). It is emphasized “the four concepts of *cooperation, prevention, local communities, and safety* are central to the official argumentation for police councils” (Birkelund 2009: 2). At the same time, a recurring theme is to make different stakeholders take responsibility for problems in their areas.

In the evaluation of the police councils, it is interesting to see that another recurring theme in the councils’ discussions was police organization and staffing. “Questions concerning police service to the public and their (lack of) presence were discussed again and again, e.g. opening hours of the sheriff’s office/the police station, lack of personnel, or how to maintain a sheriff’s office in the community. In one council, the minutes described the following topic as central to the discussion: ‘the problem that remote areas lack police patrol on weekends. The police only come when something has happened, and even then they don’t always show up!’” (Politidirektoratet 2012:13).

Since the 1980s, the police have been part of the cross-sectional networks developed to maintain local prevention efforts. The Crime Prevention Council (KRÅD) started out SLT projects in 1989. Literally translated, SLT means *coordination of local crime prevention efforts*, and it constitutes the backbone of crime prevention methodology in Norway. SLT is supposed to be a municipal cooperation between different stakeholders such as schools, social authorities and child protection, health care and the police. A large part of the cooperation takes place between managers and administrators. The model for cooperation contains three levels, headed by a SLT coordinator (Gundhus et al. 2008). Some point to the fact that the borders between SLT, Police Councils and Police Contacts may be blurred and overlapping (Difi 2017). Evaluations of SLT find large variations in the level of activities and functions around the country.

Police Councils and SLT are often mentioned in the districts’ *advice*. Councils and SLT-organizations must be established where they are absent, and SLT must be developed and revitalised where it is not working properly.

These forums are expected to fill multiple functions, but cooperation and responsibility vis-à-vis problems are central: “The purpose of a police council is making police management and municipal leaders take a joint responsibility for crime prevention and local safety.” Some want the councils to be responsible for police response also: “the police council is a strategic unit responsible for preventive and safety-enhancing work as well as police response plans and general security” (quotes above and following from the advice).

Councils are also supposed to function as communication channels and as a sort of “information exchange”, keeping track of what happens locally. “A committed cooperation through Police Councils, SLT and Police Contacts will enhance *presence, local knowledge, and a broad range of contact points*”. Communication may also flow from police to municipalities; the police role as information provider is mentioned by Møre and Romsdal districts: “the police must inform about crime levels and development. They should present analyses of all crime-related intelligence, e.g. what drives local crime or what communities are at risk at the moment.”

Community Policing Patrols

Community Police Patrols (CPPs) are police patrol units responsible for a geographically defined area in which they must also work with prevention. There are experiences with similar forms of patrolling in Denmark and Norway (POP-patrols). A known problem with such dedicated patrols is that they may end up doing regular tasks in a police organization always short on manpower and thus end up unable to engage in preventive activities (Balvig & Holmberg 2004; Gundhus 2009; Stol et al. 2011). Police District Øst suggests the use of such patrols: “The proposition will also strengthen police patrol and response by creating so-called ‘community police patrols’ supposed to work primarily with prevention. However, they are supposed to be operational and in uniform in order to be able to help out with other assignments when necessary.” The text suggests that its authors are aware of the problems with keeping such patrols out of the daily grind, but also that they feel a pressure towards recommending giving the CPPs many different functions.

Police work/investigation on the spot

Police work “on the spot” is a specific methodology concerned with gathering and registering information and winding up cases here and now. One issue is how the organization can facilitate this way of working, including providing technical support. “Police work on the spot is mainly about taking the right investigative steps as early as possible in the case, and to organize the police in a way that will support this way of working ... this includes teaching officers how to use mobile technology, record interviews and secure evidence on the spot” (*Norsk Politi* 4, 2016). This is described as a part of a quality reform, in which such measures are seen to be dependent on technology, better working routines, and qualified personnel. “The overall goal for police work on the spot is to provide the public with better policing. This means finalizing as many cases as possible on the spot ... something that will be supported by better and more stable technology” (Trøndelag Police District).

Finally, more advanced virtual solutions – the police on the net – are presented as another way of freeing personnel for community policing in that the public may report directly to the police and solve minor problems on their own.

TWO VISIONS

Police reforms are often presented as inevitable responses to changes in society. Crime trends, “new” social problems, and technological, structural, and societal changes are often described at length in white papers and other publications. Then solutions are presented, often in the form of structural changes or technological fixes that are rarely directly linked to the problems they are supposed to solve. *How* the new measures are supposed to better the situation is most often not discussed, and research or other evidence is rarely used to support the suggestions.

The real drivers behind police reform seem to be economic considerations, ideology and crime policy. One is reminded of Garland (2001), who argued that solutions within criminal justice are almost never chosen because they are proven to work; rather, they fit the spirit of the times and what is politically opportune and acceptable.

The Norwegian reform, named the Community Police Reform, is a totally traditional reform of the kind we have seen time and again in Norway since the 1980s. It builds on an ideological platform emphasizing efficiency, size, and reductions in the range of tasks.¹⁷ The quote from the résumé of the police analysis provides a good example: “The Committee also remarks that today’s local police structure does not provide the public with good police service or an efficient local police. The local structure often hinders the police in preventing crime, maintaining law and order, and offering good services. A wealth of local police offices with a limited staff – often hung up on tasks unrelated to core police business – provides neither efficient prevention, reliable response, nor efficient crime fighting” (NOU 2013: 9).

Such formulations are so familiar that they end up feeling natural. What’s wrong with them? The word *efficient* used four times in three sentences, while *good* is used three times. The police *must* be bad and inefficient. One needs to be reminded that there are other ways to understand the role of police in society. Here is another vision, another kind of language, and another way of looking at the world:

“The primary role of the police is to cater to local needs and contribute to wellbeing and safety in local communities. This is best accomplished by local police, less well when the police are located further away. People lose influence on their police when they are not present in the community” (NOU 1981).

Wellbeing and safety? This was written at a time when reported crime was rising every year – while this perspective is totally lacking in a time with reversed crime trends. *Local needs and influence?* *Common people* need to influence their police – not formal members of councils of cooperation. The wish to provide the public with “their” police as mentioned in 1981 has vanished completely – today’s demands are robust organizations that will treat everybody as customers.

One striking feature of this reform is how concepts get new meaning. It is also interesting that new concepts are minted and that the field of prevention is reshaped. This is not a new thing. When the police went through its previous reform, it was remarked that there was a substantial gap between rhetoric and reality, and that most of the content in the old ideals had been left behind (Larsson 2010). What is remarkable today is that the old concepts are still in use. Reformers pretend that they are merely “shining up the police” and making it more efficient, while in fact something completely new is created and the police role is reconfigured. Some will argue that such a transformation has already taken place. Central administrators portray empty or low-staffed sheriff’s offices as anachronistic failures. The police have become old-fashioned and inefficient and must be overhauled. In the midst of this eagerness for reform, the ten core principles from 1981 are still standing – almost as a kind of political hostages.

What did we use to mean by the concepts of community policing and crime prevention? Both are broad and somewhat diffuse (Larsson 2005). Balvig & Holmberg (2004) find that the concept of community policing is almost a kind of catch-all, but they point to four main features that are common: it is a reaction against centralization; police work must be

17. Features often placed under the umbrella of New Public Management.

planned and carried out in close cooperation with local communities; crime prevention is a core function, and citizen safety, including subjective safety, is an important objective.

In NOU (1981), the important features of the ten core principles are presented as follows:

“... small units, low degree of division of labour, multiple tasks, minimal use of force, close cooperation with the public, integration with local communities, representativeness, prevention as the main goal, accountability based on work ethics. If we are to put a name on this model, it is preferable to call it “community policing”. *Traditionally, the Norwegian police have drawn their strength from the close contact with citizens in local communities* (p. 16, italics added).

The ideals of today’s reform point in the opposite direction: big, “solid” police units, high division of labour and specialization (crime prevention specialists and experts in economic and organized crime), limited tasks and orientation towards “core areas”, formalized cooperation with partners, a response model for policing local communities, performance management. Prevention is still a central tenet, but with a new meaning and content. Whether the police represent their citizens and are influenced by them is not a theme at all.

It is all but the norm of today’s reforms that they pay limited attention to police research.¹⁸ What research has to say about the police role in society is apparently irrelevant, as is research on police reforms and their results. Police contact with the public is a central theme for much police research, such as Finstad (2000), Granér (2004), Holmberg (1999), and a host of international studies such as Reiner (2010). Police that know their public and are integrated into and cooperate with local communities are seen as an indispensable part of good policing, not only in regard to crime prevention, but also in maintaining law and order and conducting investigations (Brodeur 2010). Research further documents that police efforts to combat crime have, at best, limited impact: crime trends are driven by larger societal changes. In any case, contrary to the popular myth, crime fighting constitutes only a fraction of what the police do. Today’s reforms, therefore, build to a large extent on misconceptions about what the police is, what they can accomplish, and what kind of police the public wants.

FROM CLOSENESS TO CONTACT

“Employees of the Police Directorate maintain that they warned against using the term “community policing reform”, because this would present a demanding communicative challenge” (Difi 2017: 25).¹⁹

The centralization of the police has been going on in the Nordic countries since at least 1945, but it seems to be accelerating lately (Larsson 2010; Furuhaugen 2009). For a period in the 70s and 80s, the pendulum seemed to swing back towards local stations, integration, proximity and buzzwords like “small is good”. In the period 1930 to 2010, Norway saw a

18. Not that research is completely missing, but results are often cherry-picked to align with what has already been decided.

19. It is worth noting that the word *problem* seems to be banned. It has been replaced with *challenge*. In the present context, it almost sounds ironic.

reduction of sheriff's offices from 476 to 374; after the present reform, there will be 225 left. The number of police districts has been reduced from 54 to 12. During this period, Norway has experienced a substantial urbanization, and mobility and communication technology has developed immensely.

At the same time, politicians have kept much of the old rhetoric and ideals. This is not necessarily wrong. Most police research points to benefits from a decentralized police integrated in local communities. Peel's old principles for a civil police cooperating with the public that controls it are still worthy of our attention.²⁰ What sort of police a society should have is less a question of expected efficiency than one of more fundamental societal values.

In the final part of the paper, we shall discuss whether the propositions detailed above will actually help create ties between police and communities as suggested, and what kind of police we can expect if the suggestions are implemented.

DISPATCH OR INTEGRATE?

The present paper took its point of departure in Vestby, who argued that the basic choice is between a police that is either integrated in, or dispatched to, local communities. Will the proposed organization lead to integration? It seems that the consequence will be a police divided into different functions. On the one side, we find the Police Contacts (who will now have a heavy burden to bear) and a formalized meeting structure in SLT and Police Councils. The Police Contacts will have overlapping responsibilities – in many localities they will have several roles to fill at the weekly municipal meetings. Content and tasks will be overlapping. “A lot of our interviewees express uncertainty concerning the differences between Police Councils and Police Contacts, just as they are wondering about the specific tasks of the Police Contacts” (Difi 2017: 31). Such insecurity is understandable: The Police Contact role is “under construction” and Police Councils are also a recent innovation in most places.

In any case, the PC's daily routines will be filled up by meetings and administrative duties, and with one day set aside for municipal chores, there will be little time for local integration. The PCs will not meet the public; they will meet representatives from the municipal administration and other selected stakeholders. This much is clear in the guidelines. Regardless of good will, resources will not be sufficient for a more extended effort to make local contacts. “Some think there will be few opportunities to do preventive work for a person who has neither the time to visit schools nor the authorization to make deals with the municipalities about how to organize these tasks” (Difi 2017: 31).

Bear in mind that the idea of PCs does not stem from the police; it originates from a political agreement and is the brainchild of the political party Venstre. Are there any similar set-ups in other countries? Is this akin to Community Liaison Officers? Will they end

20. Perhaps especially principle # 7: “The police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition *that the police are the public and the public are the police*; the police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the intent of the community welfare.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/nyregion/sir-robert-peels-nine-principles-of-policing.html>

up as a kind of liaison, whose most important task is to gather and relay information and intelligence? To whom will they own their loyalty – the municipality, police management, street police, or the public?

There exists a strong belief in formalized cooperation schemes and the sharing of information between different public authorities. For the police, this is important in more than one way: one is the information flow to and from cooperating parties, another is to make the right “problem-owners” do something about recurring problems in their particular fields. There are good reasons for cooperation – but cooperation with Police Councils or SLTs does not constitute collaboration with or integration in local communities, regardless of the fact that multi-agency partnerships are considered an important part of community policing (Andersen 1996, Larsson 2010).

According to the plans, local policing is to be undertaken by police patrols. One district has suggested so-called community policing patrols that will be given responsibility for patrol and follow-up in a geographical area. There is some previous experience with this type of patrol, and the main challenge is that such patrols are not saved for local work; they end up in the daily grind of the district. The possible advantage with such patrols is that they should be able to work in the long term and get better acquainted with the local conditions.

Apart from these suggestions, the big hopes are attached to police work *on the spot*, new methodologies, and technical solutions. Such methods do not create a local police, but still some see them as part and parcel of the Community Policing Reform. “When trying to make the public buy into the reform, it is important to make people see that the sheriff’s office does not create safety – police patrols do that. We must make it clear that we are close in other ways – in cars, on technological platforms and the like” (Difi 2017:25). As we have seen, the Police Directorate and the National Commissioner share this vision.

Not everyone is equally optimistic. In more remote parts of the country, a community police based in patrol cars seems something of a contradiction. As one sheriff’s officer, who is supposed to cover a vast geographical area, puts it: “It is illogical to believe that a sheriff’s office can be replaced by a patrol car. The sheriff’s office is more than a mere sign on the wall. Relationships of trust are built over years, you do not get one by simply driving through the town centre...” (NRK 22-02-2017).

Obviously, the Police Contacts will be distanced from the officers responding to calls for service. How will the PC be able to share his or her information to the response teams? Districts suggest technical and organizational solutions: More and more information sharing will be done through data systems. Contact between PCs and patrol officers is immensely important. Existing knowledge about the merits of technological information systems in the police suggest that such solutions may not work quite as well as intended (Gundhus 2009). There is a real risk that PCs and patrol units will end up as two parallel systems with limited interaction.

FINAL REMARKS

Neither Police Contacts, Police Councils, nor police work on the spot constitutes community policing unless these concepts are redefined to mean something rather different than originally thought. The police, like other government agencies, are instead removed from

the communities. They are encapsulated (Andersen 1996). Meetings at the municipal executive level are not the same as integration in local communities. Somewhere along the way, citizens disappeared out of the picture. We got another police force, with officers few and far between in many parts of the country.

The divide between the political rhetoric and the reality is so obvious that one can't help seeing it. Several of the original ten ideals of policing that have been "holy" since the early 80s have lost their meaning. All processes now pull towards big units, specialization, centralization, cooperation with experts instead of the public, control through performance measurement in lieu of public control, and increased power to the Police Directorate. The police are held accountable from the top, not from the bottom. The idea of prevention has a new meaning: it is more goal-directed, strategic and formalized than before. One reason is that we now measure what *can* be measured and that other, non-measurable activities have lost their importance (Vestby 2012). After the Police Analysis (NOU 2013:9), the concept of prevention has been split into two parts: one comprised of *dedicated prevention agents*, stationed in district headquarters, the other comprised of forums for cooperation such as SLT, Police Councils and Police Contacts. This way of thinking about prevention as a specialized task differs substantially from earlier ideas about prevention saturating all forms of policing through strategies of problem-oriented policing (Larsson 2005). This has led to a shift in work tasks and self-understanding. Today, there is little talk about police as helpers, support and assistance. Traditionally, much of police work consisted of assignments that could not really be measured, yet was perceived to be of major importance to most people (Reiner 2010; Vestby 2012). Such assignments were important for the public's trust in, and contact with, the police.

The Norwegian sheriff's institution has its roots in the thirteenth century (Nordstoga 1992). It has been reformed over time, but has kept its importance as central public authority in rural Norway. Over the last decades, their capacity has been reduced substantially; in many parts, people will say the sheriff is long gone. In this way, the reform may be presented as an improvement. In other parts, well-functioning offices have been closed down. In any case, the reform that is now under way will provide us with a police based on different ideals of good policing – the police role is changing. Police Contacts will not be able to fill the position once occupied by the sheriff's office. The conditions in small and rural communities have also changed. Centralization, mobility, modern technology and media, and globalization are not solely urban phenomena. One can no longer take for granted that villages and small towns in the countryside are places with close ties between citizens who know and support one another. Group affiliation is waning, and stable collectives are losing their importance. Within the field of sociology, this is known as individualization and disembedding²¹ (NOU 2017: 9; Pratt 2007; Giddens 1991). In short, one can no longer assume that small communities are places of strong social control. This influences the role of police in society.

The Community Policing Reform is born in the tension between different understandings of the police role in the community. One perspective is characterized by political ideals stressing a close, "soft" police at the same time able to respond in force on short notice.

21. Disembedding entails that social relations are spread out in time and place, while social ties are weakened.

The other perspective is one of bureaucratic control stressing “freeing up resources”, better handling of “core tasks”, and top-down management. Neither the politicians of justice nor the police managers lack ambitions, but the question is whether the current amalgamation, ridden with compromise as it is, will be operational now and in the long term. The Community Policing Reform is a good illustration of how modern police organizations find themselves strung out between politics and professional management in the penal policy of today.

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