



Personalized policing

Results from a series of experiments with proximity policing in Denmark

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Keywords *Police, Strategy, Denmark*

Abstract *Describes the emergence of proximity policing – a Danish version of COP – and evaluates a series of experiments with implementation of the concept. The design and scope of each experiment is described, and their degree of implementation is assessed. Proximity policing in Denmark differs from other COP projects in that this kind of work is still the responsibility of a number of designated officers instead of the whole police force. Geographical assignments and long-term affiliation with the local areas provide for a personalization of policing – a personalization that is very popular with local and municipal liaisons to the police. The goals of the Danish experiments are very extensive, and it is concluded that all cannot be accomplished at the same time.*

Introduction

What is community policing? Apparently, nobody knows for sure (Seagrave, 1996; Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1994), a fact that is all the more surprising given the enormous interest the concept has generated over the last two decades. There is little doubt that we are dealing with a “semantic sponge” (Manning, 1997), but apparently a very popular one. One reason for the lack of a precise definition, however, might be that one of the central features of community policing is exactly the adaptation of policing to local communities – a feature that must generate heterogeneity and thus some difficulties in definition.

Given this international confusion and debate, it is perhaps not surprising that the National Danish Police did not define the concept of proximity policing – a literal translation of the Danish equivalent of COP, also used in The Netherlands (van der Vijver, 1999) – before engaging in a series of experiments on the subject. Instead, the definition was left to the participating police districts themselves, and indeed the National Police expressed the hope that the experiments themselves would provide a sort of definition: “the overall goal of the six pilot projects is – by trying out ideas and suggestions, and through (possibly scientific) evaluation – to gather, spread, and utilize knowledge and experience about proximity policing” (Rigspolitiet, 1997)[1].

This paper reports some preliminary findings from an evaluation of the Danish experiments[2]. Whereas the designs of the six individual projects are very different, it is nonetheless possible to point out a number of common features as well, features that define a Danish version of community oriented, or proximity, policing. As several of the experiments have not ended yet, the results should be interpreted with caution.



The organization of the Danish police

Denmark (population 5.3 million) has been served by a national police force since 1965, at which time the then independent municipal police forces were unified. Today, the Danish police force is formally headed by the Minister of Justice and employs approximately 10,000 officers of all ranks. One fifth of these officers are detectives, the rest belong to the uniformed branch, including various special units. The police force is subdivided into 54 districts (excluding Greenland and the Faroe Islands) ranging in size from 1,849 officers and detectives serving 491,000 citizens in the capital of Copenhagen, to 42 officers and detectives serving 62,000[3] citizens in the town of Ribe in the southwestern part of the country. As these figures indicate, the ratio of citizens to police varies greatly around the country, as does the size and characteristics of individual districts. Each district is headed by a police chief and a deputy (both jurists), whereas all other police leaders are recruited from the sworn personnel. The police chief also heads the district's prosecutors, who are stationed in the police station as well.

The Danish police force is characterized by uniformity and diversity at the same time. Uniformity is strengthened by the fact that all officers begin their careers at the national police academy (situated close to Copenhagen), where training consists of a four-year curriculum, including two one-year periods of apprenticeship in a police district (all officers start in the uniformed branch and may specialize at a later stage); furthermore, there is only one (very influential) police union; and finally, decisions about funding, equipment etc. for each of the 54 districts are made by the National Police.

But uniformity goes only so far: each district chief is granted wide autonomy, and decisions about daily operations, management, and procedural decisions in different types of cases are made at the local level. Differences exist between districts regarding the way cases are handled: what types of crimes are given priority, whether or not the police will enforce the law regarding certain misdemeanors, and so on. Even though the National Police may, in principle, be very influential, in practice they rely heavily on the voluntary cooperation from the districts. One result of this condition is that, given the ongoing struggle between districts about allocation of funds and personnel, the National Police must ensure that every district gets a "fair share" of officers so as not to alienate any one district.

This semi-autonomy of each police district has influenced the proximity policing experiments described in this paper as well. For instance, participation in the experiments was voluntary, and the experimental designs were left to the districts themselves. Furthermore, participating districts were not given extra manpower (apparently since that might generate complaints from other districts), a fact that has had major impact on the scope and design of the experiments.

Decentralized policing in Denmark

In Denmark, ideas about community/proximity policing did not really gain momentum until the early 1990s. Before that time, the police in many larger

towns and cities of Denmark did employ a number of designated “local officers”, but such units often led an isolated life. Assigned to specific areas, their responsibilities were limited to local patrolling, contact with citizens, and, first and foremost, taking care of administrative duties: serving subpoenas, checking motor vehicle registrations[4], and other routine (but often time-consuming) tasks. Such units were not created solely for the benefit of the public, they served an important organizational purpose as well: with a retirement age of 63, and few possibilities for officers to leave the force before the age of 60, the Danish police force is in dire need of positions that are less strenuous than working shifts.

From about 1990, local policing was gradually replaced by the new concept of proximity policing[5] – small police units often stationed in local proximity police stations. In some police districts, this change was only superficial; the new units had the same duties, and were manned by the same officers as before, but in others, the officers were given new tasks in addition to the old ones. The most important of these was participation in the SSP-network (a local cooperation between schools, social authorities, and the police, focused on crime prevention among children and juveniles under the age of 18).

The new proximity police units were intended to reach out to local citizens with a focus on crime prevention, but in practice they had limited success. Studies of proximity policing in Denmark showed that these units were often alienated from the rest of the police, they found it difficult to define their role towards citizens (Holmberg, 1996), their work was often derided as “social work” and not “real police work” (Reiner, 1985), and a study undertaken by the National Police (Boddum, 1996) shows that proximity policing units around the country spent from 60 to 82 percent of their time on administrative duties – as opposed to an ideal maximum of 30 to 35 percent. In turn, these findings led the National Police to consider reorganizing this part of the police organization. Boddum (1996) proposed that the National Police should carry out a series of experiments with proximity policing, and this suggestion was eventually supported by the National Police commissioner (though at a more modest level than suggested by Boddum).

External forces played an important part in this development as well. The Danish police force is funded by the national government, traditionally through a sort of block grant. In 1995, however, a majority in the Danish parliament agreed on a deal that specified the funding for the police for the period 1995-1999, while at the same time demanding specific developments in police work – most notably a 10 percent increase in police patrol hours. In the year 2000 a second agreement was made for the years 2000-2003, which, among other things, requires an expansion of the personnel dedicated to proximity policing, and a further 10 percent increase in police patrol.

Space does not allow a more elaborate analysis of how the idea of proximity policing gained so prominent a position in political and police discourse, but one thing should be noted: popular demand has not been the driving force behind the development, as reported with some COP initiatives abroad (e.g. Skogam *et al.*, 2000). The public interest in the six pilot projects has been very

modest; only in one municipality, where citizens faced the closing of their proximity policing station, did we experience a genuine citizen involvement.

The experiments

Ranked (1)-(6) from the least to the most comprehensive, the experimental designs look as follows:

- (1) This experiment covers a small town within a larger police district. Minor expansion of staff, no alterations in workload or responsibilities.
- (2) This experiment covers most of the district. Six previous proximity police stations, some with one, some with two officers assigned, will be expanded so that by 2002 all stations will have two officers assigned. No change in responsibilities.
- (3) This experiment covers a part of a larger district. A proximity police station has been established in a big mall (visited by eight million customers each year), responsible for patrolling the mall and the surrounding area. Personnel have been increased several times, but still, work in the mall (contrary to prior plans) takes up most of the manpower, partly due to extensive order problems in the mall.
- (4) This experiment covers two proximity police areas in a major city. One area, with 30,000 inhabitants, employs between 15 and 30 proximity officers, responsible for almost all policing from morning till midnight. The other area, inhabited by 90,000 citizens, was supposed to employ eight or nine officers, but after the first two years, only two officers remained, rendering the term proximity policing all but meaningless. Resource problems are prevalent, and, especially in the second area, proximity policing is not given priority by local police management.
- (5) This experiment covers a whole police district, consisting of one, geographically small, exclusively urbanized, municipality. The district is divided in three proximity policing areas, each assigned two proximity policing units: an investigating unit (partly manned by detectives) and a patrol unit.
- (6) This experiment is the most extensive, and the one that was most thoroughly planned, and this district has been named a possible model district for the future developments of proximity policing in Denmark by the National Police.

The police district covers five municipalities (several of which are rather affluent), with a total of 160,000 inhabitants, and a geographical size of 298 square kilometers. In 1999, the district employed a total of 160 uniformed officers and 42 detectives (both numbers including superior officers). Prior to the experiment, the district employed a modest, but permanent, number of designated proximity police officers stationed in substations in each municipality. The bulk of the uniformed officers were assigned the patrol division, the size of which fluctuated with department size.

As part of the experiment, this organizational setup, which is common in Denmark, was turned upside down in order to enlarge the proximity policing division as much as possible, and to make proximity policing the core activity of the force. The number of watch officers is now fixed (77 including superior officers), and the rest of the uniformed officers (apart from preexisting special units) are assigned to one of the six proximity policing units (one for each municipality, two for the largest town in the district). The existing proximity police stations in each municipality were closed, and instead three units were placed in an existing substation in the southern part of the district, the remaining three in the main station. This reorganization, which can be seen as a kind of centralization rather than decentralization, was carried out in order to promote cooperation between proximity policing areas, and to save the manpower necessary to keep the small substations open. In theory, the reorganization should provide the proximity police units with a number of officers varying from a low of 41 (including six superiors), to a high of 66, depending on the available manpower in the district. Manpower estimates, however, have been too optimistic, and the number of proximity police officers is often well below the expected minimum[6].

Even though executives from the National Police have regretted the limited scope of some of the experiments, they have not intervened in any substantial way, for instance by granting the experimental districts additional funding or personnel. This, in our view, has been the most important impediment to the experiments. Another problem has been that we, as external evaluators, were not consulted on experimental design, and plans for the evaluation were not in place until most of the projects were already launched[7].

Research methodology

As researchers, we had to realize that comparisons between the six districts would be of limited value. Furthermore, it was, in general, not possible to establish with any certainty the conditions in each police district before implementation. These difficulties led us to adopt an evaluation design using several different methods.

Observational studies of the daily work of proximity policing officers were conducted in all six districts, and officers were interviewed both formally and informally about their work and their views on proximity policing. In all, 136 eight-hour shifts were observed, and data about time spent on different assignments were collected. The majority of observations were conducted in the districts with the more extensive experiments. Observations were carried out partly by the author of this paper, partly by students and assistants with prior training in fieldwork.

In addition, a total of 76 semi-structured interviews were conducted – 27 with police officers, the rest with different liaisons to the police (local politicians, social workers, municipality employees, schoolteachers etc.).

In addition to the qualitative study, Balvig (1999, 2001) is conducting a citizen survey in three waves, the first two of which are now completed. In each wave, 2,000 people, 1,000 from one of the experimental districts, 1,000 from the rest of Denmark, are interviewed by telephone. A detailed description of these surveys is beyond the scope of this paper, since they only cover the most extensive experiment, but some of the results will be recounted below.

Common features of proximity policing – in theory

Whereas the organizational setup and scope of the six experiments vary very much, there are some common features as well. Each district has produced an initial report describing the intentions of its project, and a comparison between these reports provides an overview of the common features believed by the police to be at the core of proximity policing, Danish style.

- Proximity policing should be carried out by officers assigned to specific geographic areas. All six districts would maintain a patrol division responsible for motorized patrol and handling emergencies and urgent calls to the police. The ratio of proximity police officers to patrol officers differed, but the patrol division was larger than the proximity police division in all six districts. In this regard, the Danish version of proximity policing differs from many other countries. In parts of Sweden – as in many departments in the USA dedicated to community policing (e.g. Skogan *et al.*, 2000; Skolnick and Bailey, 1986) – proximity police officers are also responsible for handling the call load (Lindström *et al.*, 2001), but in Denmark calls are most often handled by the patrol division – just as is the case in The Netherlands (van der Vijver, 1999)[8].
- Proximity police officers should decide their own hours, in accordance with the present needs of their area.
- An important part of the work of proximity police officers should be to patrol their local areas, in order to induce local citizens with a feeling of security and to create and maintain ties with local communities. Foot patrol and bicycle patrol should be given preference, a notion supported by international research (Pate, 1986; Trojanowicz, 1986).
- Proximity police officers should be responsible for handling administrative cases regarding local citizens. Handling such cases should, ideally, bring the proximity police into close contact with the citizens in their area.
- Proximity police officers were given responsibility for the handling of “everyday crimes” (vandalism, theft, and burglaries) in their areas. In districts where the proximity police employ detectives as well, all investigation of these crimes is the responsibility of the proximity police[9].
- The proximity police should be responsible for maintaining the cooperation between schools, social authorities and the police in the SSP organization. This organization, focused on crime prevention among juveniles, predates the proximity policing experiments.
- The proximity police are supposed to engage in problem oriented policing.

Proximity policing in Denmark – in practice

In Denmark, geographical assignment was implemented in all districts, but in several, the intended number of officers assigned to a certain area was never reached. The number of citizens per officer differed very much, with a low of 1,400 citizens per proximity policing officer and a high of 45,000 citizens per officer. Some of the larger proximity policing areas were not geographically subdivided, instead officers were given different functional duties.

In most districts, officers were given responsibility for planning their own schedule, but many officers had a tendency to adjust their schedule as much to their individual needs as to the needs of their area, so most proximity police work was carried out in the daytime and early evening. In many areas, supervision was limited, to the point of being non-existent. Officers had often been assigned to the same area for several years and did not welcome interference from supervisors.

The actual time officers spent on local patrol differed very much. In the model district, our estimates showed that patrolling[10] took up only around 5 percent of total working hours, in another it amounted to one third of the officers' time. Since both of the recent parliamentary agreements on the police demand increases in patrol, a great emphasis is put on measuring the amount of time officers spend patrolling. What is actually measured, though, is not patrol hours *per se* but the overall time officers spend outside the police station – what is called outside time. Outside time, however, is not a very reliable measure of either patrol or police availability to the public, since much of this time was spent on the administrative caseload, a task not necessarily connected with general visibility.

The administrative caseload is a spillover from the local district police, and officers in general regarded it as a burden. Especially cases with fixed – and often short – time limits (such as subpoenas and summonses) require the police to put other work aside. In the (frequent) periods with shortage of personnel, some proximity policing units could only barely manage their caseload, resulting in proactive and problem-oriented policing being put on hold.

The parliamentary agreements on the police budget mentioned above also stipulate that a substantial part of everyday crimes should be investigated by the proximity police. In this respect, the experiments have had limited success. Proximity policing may mean that the officers (and in some districts, detectives working in the proximity police) get more and better information about their area, but the processing and utilization of this information is not very well organized. None of the projects have had any positive effect with regard to clearing rates, as has been reported from Sweden (Lindström et al., 2001), but a preventive effect might be demonstrated, as will be discussed below.

Proximity police officers held very diverging views on the effectiveness of the SSP organization. Some regarded participation as very worthwhile; others found that there was too much talk and too little action.

Whereas all six districts mention problem-oriented policing as a crucial part of the work of the proximity police, its actual implementation was limited. In

the initial reports providing the foundation for the experiments, POP is not defined in any clear way[11]. When confronted with persistent crime problems, the Danish police often employ a strategy of goal-directed policing, mainly consisting of intensified patrol and investigation. Many officers confused the two strategies, and found the differences hard to define. Officers often failed to recognize the difference between symptoms and underlying problems, and thus failed to perform a thorough analysis. They also often failed to engage other citizens or professionals in solving the problems. Finally, evaluating the effects of a particular effort posed difficulties.

Goals of proximity policing – does it work?

Three out of six districts (among them the ones with the most extensive projects) adopted a set of five goals for the experiments to accomplish:

- (1) Citizens should feel more secure where they live, as a result of the new way of policing.
- (2) Citizens and liaisons to the police should experience a closer connection to the proximity police.
- (3) Ethnic minorities should experience a greater empathy and understanding from the proximity police.
- (4) The number of “everyday crimes” should be reduced.
- (5) Officer satisfaction in the proximity police should improve, as should other divisions’ appreciation of the proximity police.

Several of these goals are rather ambitious, and, regarding some of them, the degree of success is difficult to measure.

Subjective security

The impact on citizens’ level of subjective security can only be gauged in the model district where the surveys were carried out. The first two waves of the survey have yielded consistent results with regard to several questions. First of all, citizens’ perceived level of security was significantly lower in the model district than in Denmark as a whole (Balvig, 2001, p. 178). Since the first survey was not completed until after project implementation, we cannot be sure that the low level of subjective security in the model district did not predate project implementation. However, according to Balvig (1999), the most probable explanation for the difference is that it is related to a rather extensive “marketing” of the proximity policing experiment[12], and a lot of public debate regarding the closing of the existing proximity policing stations. The public came to expect a level of police service that was impossible to deliver. The level of subjective security has not improved during the first two years of the experiment; furthermore, citizens perceive the visibility and availability of the police in the local areas to have declined in the period 1998-2000.

Connections between citizens, liaisons and the police

With regard to citizens' and liaisons' connectedness to the police, neither the survey results nor the observational data indicate that citizens have established closer ties to the proximity police than before[13]. On the other hand, there is little doubt that relations between proximity police and their liaisons (municipal authorities, local politicians, social workers and other professionals, and a limited number of active citizens) have improved with the advent of proximity policing. Almost all liaisons praised the fact that the proximity police officers now have "a name and a face" – a personal relationship was established. They also emphasized the emergence of an informal network, supplementing (and sometimes almost replacing) the preexisting formal network between the police and other authorities. Of the 49 liaisons interviewed, only one expressed serious reservations regarding the proximity police, whereas a few complained about their local officer – while praising the overall concept.

However, in the majority of districts, the good relations between liaisons and the proximity police often dated back several years. Only in the model district did interviewees report a clear, positive change before and after project implementation. Here, according to the liaisons, the police have become more professional in the sense that they take a broader view of their work, they engage more wholeheartedly in preventive work, and their order of priorities have changed. One liaison says:

Whereas the "old" proximity officers took pride in a visible presence with regard to the general population, it is my experience that the new proximity police have the courage to choose their time and place. When people expect to see you in the mall on a Friday afternoon, it takes some courage to say: "Well, but I'm not really needed there at that time. I might be more useful at 3 a.m., even though I might not be observed by very many people at that time." I think the new officers display more of that kind of attitude.

This statement reflects not only the general view of most of the interviewees (from this district, that is) but also the actual way officers prioritized. The proximity police did spend a lot of their time cooperating with other authorities, and general patrol/visibility was among the first tasks they gave up on when time was scarce. To the officers, cooperation with other authorities/parties offered the possibility of immediate results of their efforts, albeit often solely in the form of acknowledgement from their liaisons. In fact, more than one liaison in the model district described their satisfaction with the new level of cooperation even though they could point out no specific results – the cooperation was, in itself, experienced as a success. Part of the explanation may be that, prior to the experiment, these (often municipal) liaisons have felt both isolated and powerless when facing problems with crime and disorder, and so were much encouraged by the new possibilities of cooperation. This finding gives us reason for caution as well: whereas the establishing closer cooperation may in the short term be considered an accomplishment in itself, in the long run it must be the results of such cooperation that counts.

The more personal kind of policing manifests itself in other ways too. When prompted about possible negative effects of the experiment, another liaison said:

I can give you an example of something that is at once good and bad. There had been some problems downtown, and when the police took action, the whole thing escalated. The reason was that the problems were not handled by our own proximity officers, but by personnel from other places. This may be a bad development – we become so dependent on the cooperation with specific officers that the young people react with hostility when confronted by officers they don't know personally. But this also demonstrates that [the new way of policing] works, doesn't it?

Again this view has been corroborated by other liaisons and proximity police officers, from several districts: a personal acquaintance between police and juveniles will in some instances calm things down that otherwise might have escalated.

The term “proximity police” seems apt insofar as these officers have established a closer connection to different people in their area. Thus, the second goal of the experiments has been at least partly achieved.

The relations to ethnic minorities

The third goal was that the proximity police establish better ties to ethnic minorities. This is a very difficult topic to evaluate, for two reasons. The first is that the citizen surveys were conducted in Danish only, thus barring some citizens with other ethnic backgrounds from participating. The second is that the qualitative methods have not yielded any representative data on this subject. Thus, we must limit ourselves to some general observations.

The first is that, according to both police officers and their liaisons, police rapport with some of the juveniles with a minority background has improved, in turn making police work with these groups less confrontational, as illustrated by the quotation above. The second observation is that some individual officers have embarked upon cooperating with different ethnic groups on an array of projects. The people involved in this kind of cooperation have uniformly expressed their satisfaction with the officers (but again, they have praised the individual officers and not the proximity police in general). Finally, it should be noted that this criterion for success is a very difficult one to evaluate, especially for the police themselves.

Reduction in the level of “everyday crime”

With regard to the crime level, we neither expected nor found any discernable influence from the experiments in most districts, since no major changes were implemented. In the model district, however, the number of reported burglaries has declined by 22 percent, from 1998 to 2000, while Denmark as a whole experienced a 5 percent increase. Furthermore, the surveys indicate that citizens perceived the number of problems in their local area as significantly reduced in this period, whereas citizens in the rest of the country experienced a growing number of problems (Balvig, 2001, p. 181)[14]. Due to the short evaluation period, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Job satisfaction

In the absence of representative data from job satisfaction surveys[15], our conclusions on this matter can only be tentative, but our observations and

interviews suggest that job satisfaction has, in general, not increased. There are four major reasons for this.

- (1) *Lack of resources.* This observation pertains primarily to the most extensive projects. Here, many officers found that their expectations about new kinds of assignments and ways of work were not fulfilled. One unanticipated result of the reorganization carried out in the most comprehensive projects has been that the proximity police units become seriously understaffed in periods of low manpower, thus leaving no room for proactive or problem oriented work. In addition, it seems inevitable that a well-functioning proximity police unit will over time expand its field of activity, thus making it even more difficult to make ends meet.
- (2) *The administrative workload.* As mentioned above, it was not uncommon that such duties took up all available time, keeping the officers from doing other work.
- (3) *Unrealistic expectations.* Interviews with 12 officers conducted before project implementation revealed a general uncertainty as to the actual work of proximity police officers. Many officers harbored unrealistic ideas about their future autonomy, and thus were disappointed when they found that they could not work solely based on their own initiative. In contrast, others complained about lack of supervision and leadership. In general, most projects suffered from an initial absence of clear objectives.
- (4) *Lack of recognition and acceptance from other officers.* As has been reported with other COP projects (e.g. Lord, 1996; Sadd and Grinc, 1996), Danish proximity officers often complained about lack of recognition from their colleagues, and of being accused of not doing a proper job. Positions here were not sought after, a fact that created even more distance to the rest of the organization.

Whereas some officers praised their conditions as proximity police officers, we found that, especially for officers working in the more extensive projects, job satisfaction did not improve very much. Organizational resistance and the general low esteem of proximity police work have a major influence on the development of proximity policing.

The personalization of policing – possibilities and pitfalls

The Danish projects on proximity policing do not all deserve the label “experiment”, and even the ones that do have had limited overall success. In one respect, however, proximity policing (experiments or not) seems genuinely successful. The outstanding feature of the Danish version of proximity policing is the personalization of policing. Positive consequences of the personalization of policing include:

- Enhanced contact between the police and other professionals, enabling a swift reaction to problems, and enhancing the exchange of information between agencies.

- A more personal relationship between the police and (some of) the policed citizens. There are several examples that such a relationship helped the police reduce or avoid a hostile confrontation.
- Proximity policing makes room for officers with personal drive and new ideas. Many officers have developed special interests and projects to which they devote considerable time and energy. One, for instance, helped in establishing a meeting place for immigrants of Arabic origin; another had a weekly “consultation time” in two local schools and took a keen interest in the problems brought to him by pupils; a third was involved in a shelter for homeless people. In the view of these and other officers, this kind of work is at the core of the proximity policing idea, and they devote a lot of energy here.
- An improved foundation for the exercise of police discretion. In Denmark, patrol officers have been shown to use their rather wide discretionary freedom in a way that relies heavily on what could be termed “social profiling”. Citizens fitting the police stereotype of “typical perpetrator” – that is, known or suspected criminals – were subject to extensive control and were in some instances denied the leniency granted other citizens (Holmberg, 2000, 2001). Whereas there is no doubt that proximity police officers exercise an even greater discretionary freedom than do their colleagues from the patrol division, their decisions are not in the same way based on stereotypical signs of social status and affiliation, but rather on a personal knowledge. Furthermore, it is our impression that proximity police officers in general take a more lenient and less legalistic stance towards citizens breaking the law[16].

Negative consequences of the personalization of policing include:

- Confusion of roles in the cooperation between police and professionals. For instance, in one case involving minors suspected of extensive vandalism, the social worker (whose function in such cases is to assist the suspect(s) during police interrogation) actually threatened to withhold his assistance from one of the suspects, unless the young man confessed to the charges (which he did). Thus, the closer ties between authorities may in some cases endanger the rights of suspects.
- The individualization of police work makes it very difficult for supervisors to maintain an overview of the actual work carried out by officers.
- Such individual projects furthermore make it difficult to uphold a set of shared priorities within a proximity policing unit. Each officer finds his/her own specialization the most important, but individual projects frequently coincide with each other, or must be put on hold due to the general lack of personnel in the proximity police, thus leading to frustration among the dedicated officers. In general, proximity policing means an increased need for supervision and common perspectives, while at the same time supervisors’ possibilities of maintaining a comprehensive overview are impeded.

- The personalized police work makes it very difficult for other officers to take over, when a colleague leaves the unit. Personal ties take time to create, and they are hard to pass on to others. Thus, once well established in an area, the individual officer is hard to replace.
- Personalized policing also means personalized law enforcement. Whereas most officers seem to exercise their discretion with discretion, there is a real risk of abuse of power. In addition, in districts where each proximity policing area is served by a single officer, we have found major differences in the general level of enforcement. Some officers found the goal of establishing ties and providing service to local citizens incompatible with general enforcement of the law, others found it important to uphold their role as first and foremost police. Such differences coincide with an ideal of equal justice for all (see also Bayley, 1986; Wycoff, 1986).

Conclusion

The Danish version of community oriented policing, called proximity policing, differs from the general trend in COP initiatives in several ways.

First and foremost, a division is maintained between proximity policing officers and other police departments. Given the necessary manpower, this division provides a solution to one important problem reported with many COP and POP projects in the Western world: the difficulty of carrying out problem oriented work while at the same time managing the call load. A negative effect of this division, however, is that it isolates the proximity police and gives rise to accusations of ineffectiveness and lack of a proper police perspective.

Second, officers in general maintain an affiliation to a limited geographical area for several years, a factor that seems important for their success in establishing closer and more personal ties to local liaisons and – albeit to a lesser degree – to local citizens. This personalization of policing offers a number of advantages, including:

- an improved cooperation with other local professionals;
- the possibility of creating personal ties also to parts of the citizenry that hold a negative attitude towards the police, and in turn preventing confrontations from escalating;
- a more informed exercise of police discretion, based on individual knowledge.

Disadvantages include:

- an individualization of police work, to the point where certain tasks can only be carried out by the officer(s) who initiated them;
- problems with priorities – each officer finds his or her individual tasks the most important;
- difficulties in management oversight – only the individual officers know what work is actually done;
- possible abuse of power and unequal law enforcement.

In our view, one of the most important problems for the future of proximity policing is the documentation of results. Whereas traditional policing may not in fact prevent crime (Bayley, 1994), at least it yields tangible “results” in the form of cleared crimes and apprehended perpetrators; such “results” are not so common in the proximity police. It is far more difficult to document a crime prevented than a crime cleared. These difficulties put the proximity police in a precarious position, not only in relation to the rest of the police force, but also in relation to the general public.

Our research so far suggests that the achievements of proximity policing are of a somewhat contradictory nature. Liaisons to the police in all the experimental districts praise the proximity police for their involvement in preventive work, whereas the rest of the police criticize exactly this kind of work as being “social work” rather than “police work”.

Proximity policing in the model district seems to have had a positive impact on the level of burglaries and the local problems perceived by citizens, but at the same time, citizens in this district were more fearful of crime and less satisfied with the police than were citizens in the rest of Denmark. The results are tentative, but if the perceived improvement in the level of local problems can be attributed to proximity policing, the police have yet to receive their part of the glory. The improved quality of life has not improved citizens’ subjective security or their view of police service.

Is proximity policing worthwhile? The present study does not provide any clear answer to this question – it depends on the goals one wishes to accomplish. So far, the proximity police in Denmark have not accomplished all the intended goals, and they probably never will; different people want different things from the (proximity) police, and some of these wishes are indeed contradictory. Thus, an appraisal of proximity policing does to a certain extent depend on one’s own point of departure. As one police informant, resigned to the fact that he would never be able to prove the results of his efforts, put it: “Proximity policing is a question of belief!”.

Notes

1. Our translation.
2. The evaluation has been made possible through a research grant from the Danish National police.
3. Official figures from 1999.
4. In Denmark, possession of a motor vehicle is rather expensive, and the registration system is complex. If a vehicle owner does not pay his/her insurance or annual registration fee, or fails to present the vehicle for inspection every second year, it is the duty of the police to seize the license plates. This kind of work (almost always undertaken by the proximity police) is very time-consuming, since it involves tracking down the vehicle.
5. In a few pioneer districts, this transition took place before 1990.
6. In the fall of 2001, recurrent manpower problems have forced the district to reorganize. This reorganization is not completed at the time of writing, but a decision has been made to employ a fixed number of proximity officers instead of a varying one.

7. The Danish police force has, in general, been very reluctant to grant outside researchers access to the organization. The study at hand is the first external evaluation of police work in Denmark that has been funded by the national police.
8. In one Danish district, reports about burglaries (with no suspect present) are taken by the investigation team from the proximity police unit.
9. Investigation conducted by the proximity police is one of the demands stipulated in the parliamentary agreements on the police.
10. Here, the term patrolling refers to visible, uniformed patrol without any specific purpose other than being visible and accessible in the area. Time spent on visible police activity exceeds patrol time, since officers may be in the area with specific purposes. In no districts, however, does the amount of time spent on activities visible to the general public exceed 50 percent of officer time, and in several, the percentage is significantly lower. In general, our observations suggest that officers spend a significantly lower part of their time outside the police station than official records indicate.
11. Built into the outlines of the proposed next phase of proximity policing in Denmark is an adapted version of the SARA model proposed by Eck & Spelman (1987).
12. Public meetings about the project were held in all the district's municipalities, and there was extensive coverage (most of it of a very critical nature) in the local media.
13. Whereas citizens seem more inclined to report crimes to the police, citizens' satisfaction with local police service and their perception of police availability and visibility have declined (Balvig 2001).
14. Still, citizens in the model district experience a higher level of local problems than do citizens in Denmark as a whole.
15. Only in one district was such a survey conducted at the time of writing, and this survey did not indicate any major improvements. Surveys in other districts will be conducted at a later stage.
16. This finding is in accordance with findings in the USA (Mastrofski *et al.*, 1995).

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