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Published in:

Policing and Society: an International Journal of Research

DOI:

[10.1080/10439463.2016.1220554](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2016.1220554)

Publication date:

2017

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

O'Neill, M., & Fyfe, N. (2017). Plural policing in Europe: relationships and governance in contemporary security system. *Policing and Society: an International Journal of Research*, 27(1), 1-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2016.1220554>

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Plural policing in Europe: relationships and governance in contemporary security systems

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Policing and Society: an International Journal of Research* on 29 July 2016, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/10439463.2016.1220554>.

Plural policing in Europe: relationships and governance in contemporary security systems

Megan O'Neill and Nicholas R. Fyfe

Abstract

References to 'plural policing', 'policing beyond the police' and the 'extended policing family' are now commonplace in many discussions of policing in late modern societies. There is a danger that claims about the dynamic and changing nature of plural policing themselves become a new orthodoxy and begin to lose a sense of local nuance and recognition of the importance of place-based specificity and context in understanding the particularities of policing. It is this need to unpack the complex ways in which contemporary plural policing is now configured at a local level within different national political environments that provides the underpinning rationale for this Special Issue. Focussing on aspects of relationships and governance in six jurisdictions across northern and western Europe, it provides important insights into how the policies, practices and narratives around plural policing reflect the influence of particular histories and geographies. The first three articles are focused primarily on the relationships which have emerged in the public sector through its own processes of pluralisation, in particular, through the introduction of policing auxiliaries or municipal policing in Scotland, England and The Netherlands. The fourth article considers both relationships and governance in pluralised policing in Paris, France. A detailed analysis of the governance of safety and security is taken up in the final two articles, examining the cases of Austria and Belgium. These articles clearly demonstrate that experiences of pluralised policing vary widely within Europe and call into question the assumed dominance of neo-liberal forces in this area.

Key words

Plural policing, private security, policing auxiliaries, policing governance

Introduction

References to 'plural policing', 'policing beyond the police' and the 'extended policing family' are now commonplace in many discussions of policing in late modern societies (see Crawford, 2008; Crawford et al, 2005; Jones and Newburn, 1998). Indeed, it is now over 10 years since Jones and Newburn observed that 'policing is now authorised and delivered by diverse networks of commercial bodies, voluntary and community groups, individual citizens, national and local regulatory agencies, as well as the public police' (2006, p.1). The key drivers of these developments are also seemingly well established. These range from fundamental shifts in the 'culture of control' in which the myth of the 'sovereign state' having a monopoly over tackling crime has been challenged by the growing

evidence of the role played by other private, municipal and voluntary forms of control (Garland, 2001), to more instrumental issues reflecting the changing nature of built environment through the expansion of mass private property, gated communities and an expanding night-time economy. Nevertheless, there is a danger that these generalised claims about the dynamic and changing nature of plural policing themselves become a new orthodoxy and begin to lose a sense of local nuance and recognition of the importance of place-based specificity and context in understanding the particularities of policing (Lum and Fyfe, 2015). It is this need to unpack the complex ways in which contemporary plural policing is now configured at a local level within different national political environments that provides the underpinning rationale for this Special Issue. Focussing on aspects of relationships and governance in six jurisdictions across northern and western Europe, it provides important insights into how the policies, practices and narratives around plural policing reflect the influence of particular histories and geographies.

Structure of the Special Issue

The first three articles are focused primarily on the relationships which have emerged in the public sector through its own processes of pluralisation, in particular, through the introduction of policing auxiliaries or municipal policing (policing 'below' the police, see Loader 2000). Policing auxiliaries can experience difficulties in terms of defining their own occupational identities and building relationships with local police officers. However, the degree to which they focus their role towards community-orientated activities or enforcement work not only varies from one country to another, but also within localities. Donna-Marie Brown begins this discussion with an examination of the work and experiences of Community Wardens in Scotland. Community Wardens as employees of local councils are not members of the police per se, but are regarded as part of the 'extended policing family' (Johnston 2003). They work in 'high risk' areas, localities more prone to crime and anti-social behaviour, as part of a programme of community safety initiatives. Brown argues that while their work does involve a degree of collaboration with the police, the Wardens regard themselves as the 'eyes and ears' of the *community* foremost. It is within the Wardens' role to address issues of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and community safety, but they tend to regard themselves primarily as mediators and community negotiators who are well positioned to address community problems. Relationships with police officers were difficult in the early days of their implementation, but this has improved over time as structures have been developed to include them in briefings and local policing activities.

That Community Wardens are not paid employees of the police did not prevent confusion for members of the public in terms of who Wardens were and what their purpose was when they were first introduced. This has eased over time and Wardens now see it as a strength that they are not police employees. They feel that they tend to be trusted and receive intelligence about local crime issues that the police do not (Brown 2017). This same process of negotiating one's professional identity is also an issue for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), the subject of the second article in this special issue. However, as Megan O'Neill discusses, this process of negotiating and proving their professional identity is a daily task for PCSOs in England and Wales. Unlike Wardens, PCSOs are a part of the public police: hired, trained and paid by their local police force. This has exacerbated their difficulties in terms of finding an acceptable role within policing and within the communities they serve. PCSOs, like Wardens, are also actors in the 'community safety' landscape. They were created to provide a visible policing presence in communities through high visibility patrol and community engagement work. PCSOs are acutely aware that they are not police officers, however, and as paid members of their police forces they cannot claim to be 'of' the community either. While some PCSOs have gained a large degree of acceptance by their police officer peers, this was not the case for all the PCSOs in O'Neill's research. In contrast to Wardens, PCSOs regard themselves as the 'eyes and ears' of the *police*. Their marginal status within the police has also been interpreted as a strength of the role in that they report receiving local information from residents that would not be reported directly to police constables. Despite these clear successes for PCSOs, many still reported an ongoing struggle to be accepted as legitimate members of community policing teams. O'Neill uses an analytical framework adopted from Goffman's 'dramaturgical' perspective to analyse the processes PCSOs have developed to negotiate their position within public policing and the resulting failure of PCSOs to successfully fully integrate as legitimate members of these teams.

While both PCSOs and Community Wardens have a surveillance component to their role, and it is this component which police officers often view as the most valuable aspect of their work, surveillance and intelligence-gathering is not the primary task of these auxiliaries. They have both emerged in a 'community safety' context, designed to enable communities to engage more fully with the policing of their area in a collaborative way (if possible). The same cannot be said for the policing actors in the third article of this issue, the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) in the Netherlands. Ronald Van Steden explores this group of 'quasi-police' who are employees of local municipalities. The MLEO is a development of the previous 'City Warden' role. After their initial implementation, the City Wardens came to have a poor reputation. They had no additional powers beyond that of the citizen and their recruitment standards were considered to be low. Many people

were hired as Wardens in a programme to reduce unemployment, which further damaged their image. The new MLEO role has a higher recruitment standard and more powers for addressing incivilities and anti-social behaviour, including the power of arrest. Their primary purpose is to supervise behaviour in local neighbourhoods and town centres, including gathering intelligence where possible, reporting problems and responding to calls from the public. Considering this focus, and their local contextualisation, they provide a direct challenge to the public police in terms of the primacy of their position in Dutch policing. While the public police have the official power to direct the activities of MLEOs, this does not often happen in practice. Van Steden argues that this shows the limitations of an Anglo-American model of pluralisation: in the case of the Netherlands, it is the municipal officers who have the most contact with and influence over local social control, not the public police. Thus presents a further fracturing of public policing but in a way not experienced in British or American contexts.

Paris, France, also presents a unique configuration of pluralised policing not seen in Anglo-American models, and also not seen in most of France. De Maillard and Zagrodzki describe how, despite France's traditional tendency towards centralisation, the policing arrangements in Paris are highly pluralised. In order to address issues related to parking, noise pollution, safety and public tranquillity in the city, two municipal groups and one private sector agency have been created which work in collaboration with the National Police. The Inspectors of Security are municipal staff who have limited powers for administering fines for minor crimes and cleanliness violations. The Night Correspondents are also municipal officers who focus their work on 'sensitive' neighbourhoods in Paris in order to address issues of conflict in public places. They also have limited powers, but rarely use them. The final group, which is based in the private sector, are the *Groupement parisien intrbailleurs de surveillance* (GPIS). They, too, work in areas of 'sensitive' social housing and can evict persistent disruptive tenants from the properties. However, they have no additional powers beyond this. These arrangements in Paris thus present a situation which might find resonance in Crawford's (2008) five models of collaboration between public and private sector policing (which are integrationist, steering, network, market and private government). De Maillard and Zagrodzki argue, however, that this has not been the case. They use alternative configurations which involve varying degrees of interaction and co-ordination with the National Police: monopoly, delegation, coordination or joint operations. For De Maillard and Zagrodzki, this demonstrates that the structure of plural policing is not a fixed point and that local circumstances can produce alternative methods of working not seen in Anglo-American models. Their analysis also presents a unique example of the pluralisation of the public sector itself. For example, in contrast to the manner in which Wardens and

PCSOs avoid too direct an association with the public police for fear of contamination by association (as described by Brown and O'Neill in this issue), the auxiliaries here actively seek out collaborations with the police to give their work an enhanced legitimacy.

De Maillard and Zagrodzki, while primarily considering relationships between the public and private sectors, also begin to address the other key foci of this special issue: governance. A detailed analysis of the governance of safety and security is taken up in the fifth article by Jan Terpstra. He considers plural policing in another highly centralised state, in this case, Austria. As in France, there is a national police force in Austria which has the official mandate for policing. Municipalities in Austria also are allowed to form their own police forces, but at the current time only 37 of the more than 2000 municipalities have done so. In addition, legislation prevents cities from developing their own police forces meaning that public policing is not highly localised. This has led to concerns about sufficient policing in public areas. As a compromise, the Austrian government has allowed the development of 'City Guards' (or other similar titles) who work for private companies and patrol public areas, enforcing parking laws and conducting surveillance. Despite this development of policing pluralisation in Austria, the country remains one where private policing is not well developed and is a topic of great controversy. As Terpstra argues, the political history of Austria is central to this and cannot be dismissed. A great fear remains in government about creating too many police forces which could become politicised, leading to unrest. As a consequence, neoliberal privatisation has not taken hold here in the same way as in other nations of the west. For Terpstra, this fear is a key component of understanding the governance of policing in Austria and cannot be regarded as 'nostalgia' (as he argues Shearing and Wood (2003) would contend). Therefore, the public police in Austria are far more than just another 'node' in a policing network. This puts into question the use of the nodal framework in cases such as this and challenges the view that neoliberalism is a global phenomenon.

The final article of this special issue also critiques current debates around plural policing governance (such as those of Johnston and Shearing 2003 and Crawford 2006) as well as debates around government (such as that of Loader and Walker 2001). Elke Devroe, using the 'governmentality' thesis of Foucault, argues that such debates do not fit with the situation in Belgium. This country is highly politicised and this has resulted in a complex and multi-layered governance structure for policing. Due to previous corruption scandals involving the police and politicians, a large-scale reform project was conducted in 1998 to restructure policing but with sensitivities to the various local, regional and national structures of Belgium. The result is that the majority of policing in

Belgium is located within the state at a ratio of 1/3 federal police to 2/3 local police. Private policing is not a large industry, with state police outnumbering private police about 3:1. In Belgium, as in Austria, there is a strong political will that policing needs to remain within the realm of the state to keep the political compromise achieved by the reform project intact. The Social Democrats are particularly opposed to the development of privatisation and they hold power in key government positions. There have been municipal policing officers in the past, but these have since been reabsorbed into the state police. Similarly, some private security agents are active, but only in very small numbers. Therefore, for Devroe, policing in Belgium is a clear case of a power game where various political interests have been co-opted into the resulting governing arrangements. This was achieved through a non-consensual process which was not driven by the needs of the market or by efficiencies, as has been the case in other countries.

Conclusion

Individually and collectively the papers in this Special Issue provide a rich understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of plural policing in Europe. They also underline the importance of the plurality of conceptual frameworks and disciplinary perspectives needed to make sense of this landscape. While within criminology pluralism has been constructed as a 'problem' (Loader and Sparks, 2011), one of the key strengths of research in policing (exemplified by the papers here) is that it continues to draw inspiration from a range of theoretical positions and different academic disciplines. Similarly, the papers also illustrate a degree of methodological eclecticism (from key informant interviews and documentary analysis to more ethnographic approaches) which helps provide key insights into both the inter-personal and inter-institutional relationships which are so important to a holistic understanding of policing initiatives. Looking to the future, it will be interesting to see how wider changes in the policing and security environment in Europe will impact on the development of plural policing. The pressure for increased centralisation of public police organisations for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness has been gathering momentum across northern and western Europe over the last 10 years. This has involved merging police districts and in some cases the creation of new national police forces (see Fyfe, Terpstra and Tops, 2013). What impacts will such developments have on the space for more localised policing initiatives? The continuing concerns around terrorism and security will also play an important role in shaping the environment within which different forms of policing operate. The salience of the security agenda has already been seen as posing an important threat to more community-oriented policing activities by shifting the focus towards issues of radicalisation and terrorism and away from what local citizens may feel are their priorities (Newburn, 2008). What impact this will have on the types of initiatives

discussed in this Special Issue will be an important theme for future research. This intersects with a set of broader issues regarding trust, legitimacy and leadership in different types of police organisations. While these topics have received considerable attention in the context of public police organisations in recent years, they remain relatively underexplored in the context of other policing bodies. Important conceptual and empirical questions include understanding levels of public acceptance for plural policing, which types of security actors are perceived as legitimate and what leadership styles characterise municipal and private policing organisations. This also raises the prospect of developing a stronger normative agenda to inform future research on plural policing. Now more than ever we need not just a vision of 'good policing' but a vision of 'good plural policing'. This should include the capacity to promote better public security, a reduction in crime, enhanced social justice, and the protection of liberty and human rights in democratic societies.

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