

# Police patrol work in Norway and the implementation of community beat policing

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(2010 Conference in Oslo)

## Introduction

Police patrol work is key to understanding police management and police-citizen interaction. In this paper we present the methodological framework and some findings from a comparative study of police patrols in Europe. The motivation for this study is that people in society and those who are responsible for the management of police work, should know what officers do in order to be able to give a meaningful interpretation of police management and of the democratic control of the police.

In our study police patrol work is seen as constituted by police activities. We have observed what police officers do when they are out on patrol. The main question explored is what determines what is involved in police patrol work. But there is always something before the police officer's activities, namely the contextual factors that explain why police officers do what they do, such as level of urbanisation, work load, group culture and police management. This context can be referred to as the 'why' of police patrol work. In this paper we will present a conceptual model capturing both the 'what' and the 'why' of police patrol work.

The outcome of the police officer's activities can be viewed as police effectiveness. However, this study is about police actions, about what police officers do

when out on patrol, it is not about police effectiveness. In the end one should be concerned with the social effectiveness of policing. After all, the core issue in policing is to secure a satisfying level of safety; police action is the means to this end, not an end in itself. But since police actions are important elements in the constitution of police performance, one of the core issues in police management is to give direction to what police officers should do or do not do when out on patrol. Furthermore, within the framework of this study we are not interested in how fast police officers do what they are doing.

In this paper we will describe the methodological framework, and thereafter we will introduce some results from Norway. In a concluding section we use these findings to discuss various models of implementing community beat policing.

## Definitions

Before we describe the method we will define the central terms 'emergency patrol' and 'community beat patrol'. The emergency patrols basic assignment is to supervise their patrol area and react to citizen calls. Most often they are uniformed police officers in a marked police car, usually two (in Norway, three), being supervised by a command and control centre.

What the officers should give attention to between citizens' calls, differs from place to place. What officers actually do between citizens' calls is remarkably the same in almost all places: they keep an eye on the traffic: they give attention to traffic violations and they carry out car stops and searches (Stol et al 2006).

'Community beat policing' is not as standardised as emergency patrol. While doing community beat policing the officers normally work alone; they usually do their patrol work in uniform but also regularly in plain clothes, for example when they are visiting citizens at home. As a rule a community beat officer's basic assignment is to build up and maintain relationships with the public and/or to prevent or tackle law and order problems, preferably in close cooperation with other welfare agencies. In other words, the officers follow a problem-orientated style of policing. When out on the beat, they walk or cycle, but community beat officers also patrol with a car. Different from emergency patrol officers, community beat patrol officers are not supervised by a command and control centre and as a rule they will not be assigned to citizen calls.

Another core term is 'incident'. An incident is each encounter between a police officer and a citizen. We also speak of an incident in cases of emergency calls that are passed on to the officers but that are not followed by an encounter between the officers and the public. An encounter is reported if a police officer and a citizen have verbal or non-verbal contact and the officer is performing in the role of the police.

## Method

The research design is built on earlier research on police patrol work in the Netherlands and Belgium, in total seventeen observation studies (Stol 1996; Stol et al., 2006). The aim is to enlighten the characteristics and in particular the peculiarities of local police patrol work -emergency patrol as well as community beat policing. To do this we need a method of drawing a picture of patrol work and we need a frame of reference to distinguish between the more or less standard findings and the non-standard or unusual ones.

The method of the research is systematic social observation. Systematic, because observations are directed by structured protocols, including a list of variables that have to be recorded about each incident; social, since the method is based on participating observations in a police team. This method is basically a qualitative method. Since we make use of structured protocols, we could speak of a qualitative method with a systematic approach. The field worker is attached to a group of police officers, which means that he or she will be out on patrol with different police officers. The idea is not to draw a picture of the style of policing of one specific officer, but to draw a picture of policing in a certain area.

In total the team of experienced academics in the field of police studies, consisted of seven persons from the five different countries; the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Norway. They took care of getting access to police forces, the recruitment of qualified field workers and the writing of a book about this study. The 'we' also includes thirteen field workers. In all of the five countries we wanted to make observations in two places: one place representing police work in an urban area and the other place representing police work in an area with a low population density. We also wanted to observe emergency patrols as well as the local form of community policing. We carried out the field work in twelve places <sup>(1)</sup>. In four out of five countries we managed to get access to the type of police teams we were searching for <sup>(2)</sup>.

Between September 2005 and March 2007 we observed emergency patrols as well as community policing in the twelve places, a total of 24 observations. Each observation consisted of us following the standard police duty schedule during twenty shifts. The field workers produced two key documents: their completely worked-out field-work notes and SPSS code forms — one for each incident. Although the field workers were asked to describe every incident in their own words, they were also asked to take into account the SPSS variables when describing an incident. He or she made also notes about,

<sup>(1)</sup> The twelve places are: Groningen (NL), Leeuwarden (NL), Assen (NL), Roskilde (DK), Hillerød (DK), Bochum (D), Münster (D), Brussel (B), Dendermonde (B), Aarschot (B), Oslo (N) and Lillestrøm (N).

<sup>(2)</sup> Denmark is the exception here as both of the police teams were located in the countryside.

for example, what police officers said about priorities in police work, and about what the officers did between the incidents. Management were interviewed, and the field workers wrote an additional field-work report with information about the city involved, the police force's organisation structure and local police policy.

In various ways attention is given to the inter-observer reliability. Stol supervised the field work in all participating countries, and was also able to read the languages of the countries involved. Preceding each field-work, Stol discussed the working procedures to be followed on the basis of an observation protocol with the local research team. The protocol included definitions of key concepts and instructions on how to record the observations, and provided the field workers with guidelines about how many and what kind of duties should be included into the field-work. Every description of an incident together with the corresponding SPSS code form went through a working procedure that was designed to achieve the highest possible level of inter-observer reliability <sup>(3)</sup>.

The basic idea with the frame of reference is quite simple, and, consequently, the instrument is easy to use. For example, observation of emergency patrol work in the twelve cities, may discover that 57 per cent of all the incidents from all places have to do with maintaining the law. This 57 per cent can function as a reference number. This kind of average appears to be quite stable over time and place, which means that the characteristics of police patrol work are quite stable over time and place <sup>(4)</sup>. However, the average values are no more than a tool helping us to discover special characteristics of local police work. Average values are not norms. If some local police patrol work significantly deviates from the average values, it does not mean that this patrol work is better or worse than the average. It's different. In this study we want to find an answer to the question of what causes the difference.

Hence, we have a method for drawing a picture of police patrol work and we have a frame of reference that we can use to discover characteristic features of the patrol work in question <sup>(5)</sup>. Systematic social observation draws a picture of patrol work using several characteristics that are derived from the kind of incidents the officers deal with. The characteristics are:

- work load or the number of incidents per hour;
- the sort of incidents police patrol work consists of, such as traffic, serious crime, networking;
- the outcome of incidents: do police officers give a warning, fine someone or perhaps make an arrest?;
- police mobilisation: do the police come into action because of a citizen call or was the incident a police initiative?;
- the marginal persons the officers have to deal with, such as addicts, mentally disturbed persons, homeless persons;
- police knowledge of people in the neighbourhood;
- the use of information sources — since that is a key factor in the production of knowledge, which is a core issue in police work.

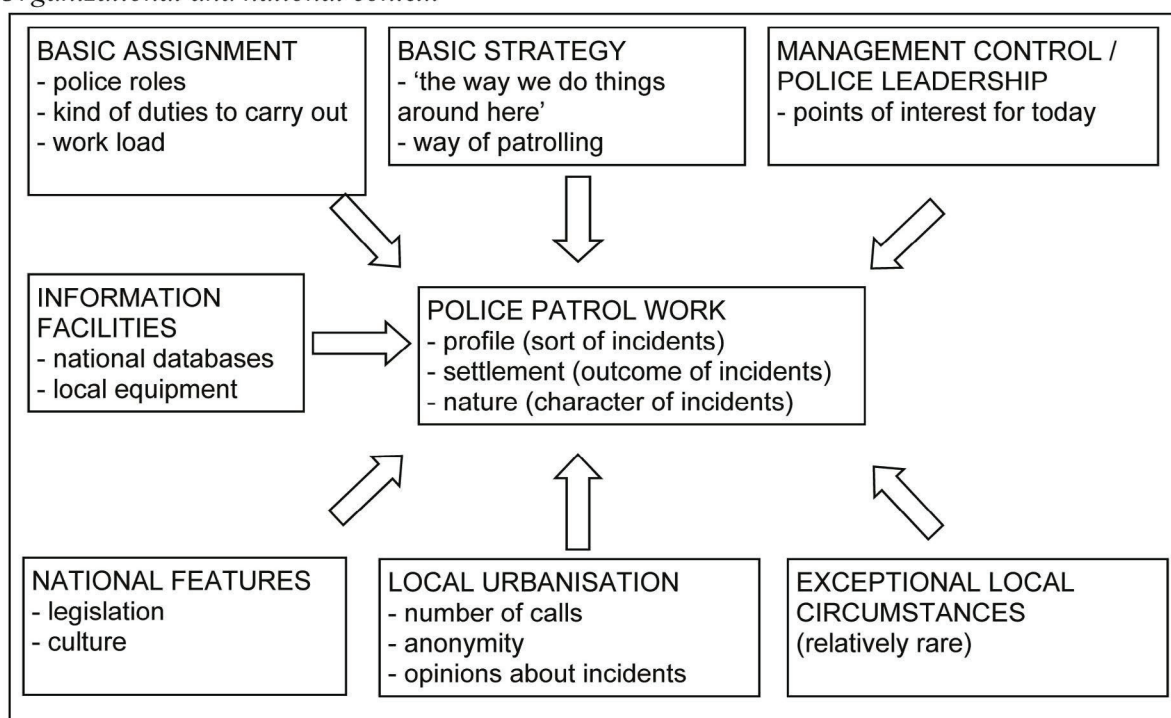
When certain characteristics deviate from average value, we search for an explanation in the conceptual model <sup>(6)</sup>. The conceptual model consists of seven explaining factors, and is based on earlier research. As illustrated in figure 1, three factors on top and the one on the left refer to organisational issues. Three factors on the bottom of the model refer to aspects of the sociological environment of the organisation. These factors are explaining what is involved in local police patrol work, in the centre of the model.

<sup>(3)</sup> Since we have observed 4 183 incidents and the SPSS form consists of 62 variables. During the field work Stol checked about 260 000 times if a specific piece of the field work notes matched with its corresponding SPSS-value. During the emergency patrol we observed a total of 1 166 hours police work on patrol. We recorded 2 089 incidents. We were on patrol with community beat officers during 809 hours. During these hours we recorded 2 094 incidents.

<sup>(4)</sup> Stol's (1996, Stol et al., 2006) earlier research produced a database about police patrol work, and the proportion of incidents that fall into the category 'maintaining the law' is 56 per cent.

<sup>(5)</sup> The method and the frame of reference are free. They are both well documented in English and they are known as 'freeware' because we believe that if we want to develop police studies in Europe, it is important that we can use each other's research methods and that we, as a result, can compare our research findings and learn from each other.

<sup>(6)</sup> In 2004, on the basis of the work of Sherman (1980) and Bayley (1985, 1994), and methodologically mixed observational studies, Stol et.al. attempted to find a conceptual model for police patrol work, to give impetus to the further development of a theory (2006: 170-5). After the study this model was redesigned and extended, and we revised the conceptual model of Stol et.al. (2006) into Figure 1.

*Organizational and national context*

**Figure 1: conceptual model of police patrol work**

'Basic assignment' refers to the principal task or role the police officer in question has to fulfil. Basic assignment is the answer to the questions, 'how do we structure our organisation?' or 'what kind of police roles do we wish to distinguish?'. 'Basic strategy' is the answer to questions such as 'what are the principle elements of this police role?' or 'what are the basic ideas of this kind of police work?'. 'Management control' or 'police leadership' refer to everything that police chiefs do to stimulate or urge officers to undertake specific actions when out on patrol. 'Information facilities' refers to the databases the officers have access to and it refers to how easy it is for the officers to get access to the data. 'National features' refers to national peculiarities, such as specific pieces of legislation or cultural characteristics that are typical for a certain country. 'Local urbanisation' refers to the number of inhabitants per square kilometre. 'Exceptional local circumstances' refers to phenomena that clearly dominate police work in a certain area.

### Some results from Norway

We will now present some of the tables that follow from our observations and show how these tables lead us into the world of police management. Before we have a look at the data, it is important to emphasise that a table where 50 per cent of all incidents lie in the sphere of traffic, indicates a certain proportion of all incidents, not a proportion of time. We start with presenting some tables from observations of emergency patrol and community beat patrol, and compare these with our frame of reference. The results will lead us to a discussion about the implementation of community beat policing.

#### Emergency patrol

Let us first have a look at emergency patrol. Table 1 shows how many incidents the emergency patrol officers are involved in per hour.

**Table 1**

Work load (incidents per hour)

	Average 12 cities	Oslo	Lillestrøm
Emergency Patrol			
Incidents	1.8	1.4	**1.2
Citizen calls	0.8	0.6	0.6
Police initiatives	1.0	0.8	**0.6

\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.001$  (independent T-test)

Table 1 shows that the Oslo figures do not deviate from the reference numbers. In other words: these figures do not indicate that emergency patrol work in Oslo has specific characteristics. There might be many specific characteristics with emergency patrol work in Oslo,

but this table does not make them visible. The table for Lillestrøm shows us that emergency patrol officers are involved in few incidents per hour. Specifically, the officers in Lillestrøm do not come into action on their own accord so often. Table 2 indicates an answer.

**Table 2**

Proportion of traffic (%)

	Average 12 cities	Oslo	Lillestrøm
Emergency Patrol			
All incidents	41.6	37.7	**30.1
Citizen calls	18.9	9.5	30.6
Police initiatives	62.9	69.1	**29.5

\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.001$  (Z-score for proportions)

Table 2 shows that emergency patrol work in Lillestrøm only has a small proportion of traffic incidents. Especially when police officers come into action on their own accord, the proportion of traffic is relatively small — no more than 29.5 per cent, while the average percentage is 62.9. In other words, Lillestrøm emergency patrol officers do carry out significantly less car checks than the average proportion.

It is not immediately clear why this is so. This finding seems to be contrary to the fact that traffic is prioritised in Lillestrøm's activity plan. However, Romerike police district have a special traffic unit located at Lillestrøm police station. Its main priority is to carry out roadside checks and take action against traffic violations. Four times a year the traffic unit organises a large-scale road-side check in cooperation with other agencies and with emergency patrol officers. We have observed such a happening but we did not include this shift in our analysis because during this shift the emergency

patrol officers were not assigned to emergency patrol as defined in our study.

The fact that the emergency patrol officers have to cover a large patrol area also plays a role. As the chief of police stressed during an interview, the officers have to drive long distances from incident to incident. Maybe this can explain why the daily working routines in the Lillestrøm emergency patrol do not leave much room for incidents initiated by the officers. They are just too busy travelling from A to B. Instead of a 'stop and search strategy', which would cost them too much time, we saw them using a 'check on the move' strategy, with help from their colleagues from the incident room. Since traffic checks on the move do not include a police-citizen interaction, these police initiatives are not incidents in our study.

Another explanation is that emergency patrol officers are not asked by management to take action in the

sphere of proactive policing outside the area of traffic. It was the chief of police's opinion that officers have no time left for police actions on their own initiative.

These findings point to a correlation between police numbers and the proportion of traffic in police patrol work. Stol et al. (2006) ran into this issue several times in the course of the observational studies on police patrol work. There is a connection between proportion of traffic and work load: the less occupied the officers are, the more traffic incidents (car stops and searches). The less citizen calls, the more police officers will come into action of their own accord in the sphere of traffic. Consequently: increasing the police numbers means that police management de facto gives priority to car stops and searches, unless police management

is capable of ensuring that police officers do otherwise — which is rarely the case. Of course, police management are able to define other priorities than traffic, and they do. But the problem is that they do not translate priorities such as 'violence', 'youth' and 'drugs', into concrete activities that police officers can (and should) undertake when out on patrol. Consequently, police officers stick to what is easy for them to do: take a number plate and check it, stop a car and check its driver.

### Community beat policing

Table 2 shows that community beat policing in Oslo as well as in Lillestrøm have relatively few incidents per hour.

**Table 3**  
Workload (incidents per hour)

	Average 12 cities	Oslo	Lillestrøm
Community Beat Patrol			
Incidents	2.6	** 1.8	**1.5
Citizen calls	0.4	0.4	0.6
Police initiatives	2.2	** 1.0	**1.0

\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.001$  (Z-score for proportions)

This can be explained by the fact that the officers do not often come into action of their own accord. Community beat patrol (CBP) officers in both cities are quite reactive and not very proactive — compared to the average. How can this be explained?

The CBP in Oslo, as well as Lillestrøm, is done by 'regular' police officers. They are focused on emergency patrol routines and other established police tasks; they are not CBP officers in the real sense of the word. When they are on the street in the role of 'community beat patrol officer' they perform this task as if they were officers in an emergency patrol car, waiting for headquarters to assign jobs. The consequence is that police officers

assigned to community beat patrol are being assigned jobs by a command and control centre.

In all countries in our study a core issue in policing is that the police have to work on improving the relationship between the police and the public. A central strategy here is the implementation of community beat policing. Community beat patrol officers should establish and maintain relationships with the public. In our study we have noted when the police officers meet someone they know during the incidents. The idea behind this is that officers who have established good contacts in their neighbourhood, will often meet someone they know. Table 4 shows the results.

**Table 4**

Proportion of incidents in which police officers meet someone they know (%)

	Average 12 cities	Oslo	Lillestrøm
Community Beat Patrol			
Incidents	30.9	** 1.3	18.3
Traffic	7.5	0.0	6.7
Social problems	57.5	** 6.3	42.9
Other	38.3	** 1.3	22.2

\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.001$  (Z-score for proportions)

Table 4 shows that the proportion of incidents in which the community beat patrol officers in Oslo meet someone they know is very small compared to the average: 1.3 percent while the average is 38.3 percent. The second-smallest proportion was observed in Aarschot, Belgium (13.6 %) and the third-smallest in Lillestrøm, Norway (18.3 %). Even when the officers in Oslo deal with social problems — like domestic disputes, homeless persons, mentally disturbed persons — they meet an acquaintance in a relatively small proportion of all incidents. Population density may be of relevance here. But is not the decisive factor since the other cities in our study with a high population density do not have a proportion that is significantly smaller than the average: Brussels: 63.4 %, Groningen: 40.8 %, Leeuwarden: 30.8 %, Bochum: 25.0 %. It is not possible to identify a specific type of incident that is responsible for this 1.3 per cent in Oslo. It seems an overall phenomenon.

Although in Lillestrøm the proportion of incidents in which the officers meet someone they know is no more than 18.3 per cent, this proportion is not significantly smaller than the average. We came to the conclusion that a decisive factor here is that community beat patrol in Oslo, as well as Lillestrøm, is done by 'regular' police officers. They perform the role of community beat officers as if they were emergency patrol officers, waiting for a call. Their mindset is towards reactive policing, not proactive community policing. Since Lillestrøm is a smaller community, the police officers still meet someone they know once in a while. Oslo community beat policing has hardly any ties with the general public. It is more directed towards law and order maintenance.

## Discussion

The style of community beat policing in Oslo as well as in Lillestrøm was reactive and not directed towards improving the relationship between the police and the public. The intention of our observational study is not to evaluate the situation in a specific police team. The main goal of the study is to provide police management with better insight into police patrol work and its manageability. So, let us now move to a broader perspective and ask ourselves the question of how the police can implement community policing.

In essence there are two implementation philosophies. The philosophy we have observed in Oslo and Lillestrøm is what may be called the philosophy of the wide movement. In this vision all police officers should move towards community beat policing at the same time. All police officers have to move simultaneously from a reactive to a proactive style of policing. The opposing strategy is what we could call the strategy of the pioneers. Some officers start with community beat policing, stimulating others to do their share in this movement. And we can imagine several strategies that lie somewhere between these two far ends.

Based on our observations we can distinguish between five models of community policing. The models are what one may call 'ideal types'. They are analytical constructs grounded in empirical research. We have not observed one of these models in a pure form. However, if one looks at police patrol work in a certain place, it is quite easy to recognise one of these models as the main structuring principle behind community beat policing.



- (1) The first one may be called the support model. In this model, community beat officers are put at the service of other authorities, such as police chiefs and judicial bodies. We have observed this model to a certain degree in Belgium.
- (2) The second model is what may be called a reactive model of community policing. Officers assigned to community beat policing are put at the service of local society. A part of their work consists of dealing with calls from the public. It is not difficult to recognise community beat patrol in Oslo and Lillestrom in this model.
- (3) The third model is the POP model, from problem-orientated policing. Perhaps we could better call this model POP-light. CBP officers conduct an analysis of criminological and/or social problems in their neighbourhood and then proactively try to solve these problems, preferably with the help of other welfare agencies.
- (4) The fourth model is the full-POP model. This one is the same as POP-light but in addition to POP-light, emergency patrol officers are put at the service of the community beat officers. In other words, in this model community beat officers give direction to what emergency patrol officers undertake during the time between calls or during the time when they are not assigned to emergency patrol.
- (5) The last model is the same as the full POP model but with no officers assigned to emergency patrol. Emergency patrol as such no longer exists. If there is an alarm call any officer may go to the scene to settle the incident. After the incident is settled he or she continues working on priorities in the light of problem-orientated policing. We have not observed this model in practice. So far, this model only exists in the mind of some police chiefs and in some policy documents.
- To conclude, we will present three examples of organisational structures that we have observed in our study. Each represents one of the above models. The first is the situation we have observed in Oslo and Lillestrom (Model 2).

## Different ways to organize CBP: Oslo and Lillestrom (‘wide movement’)

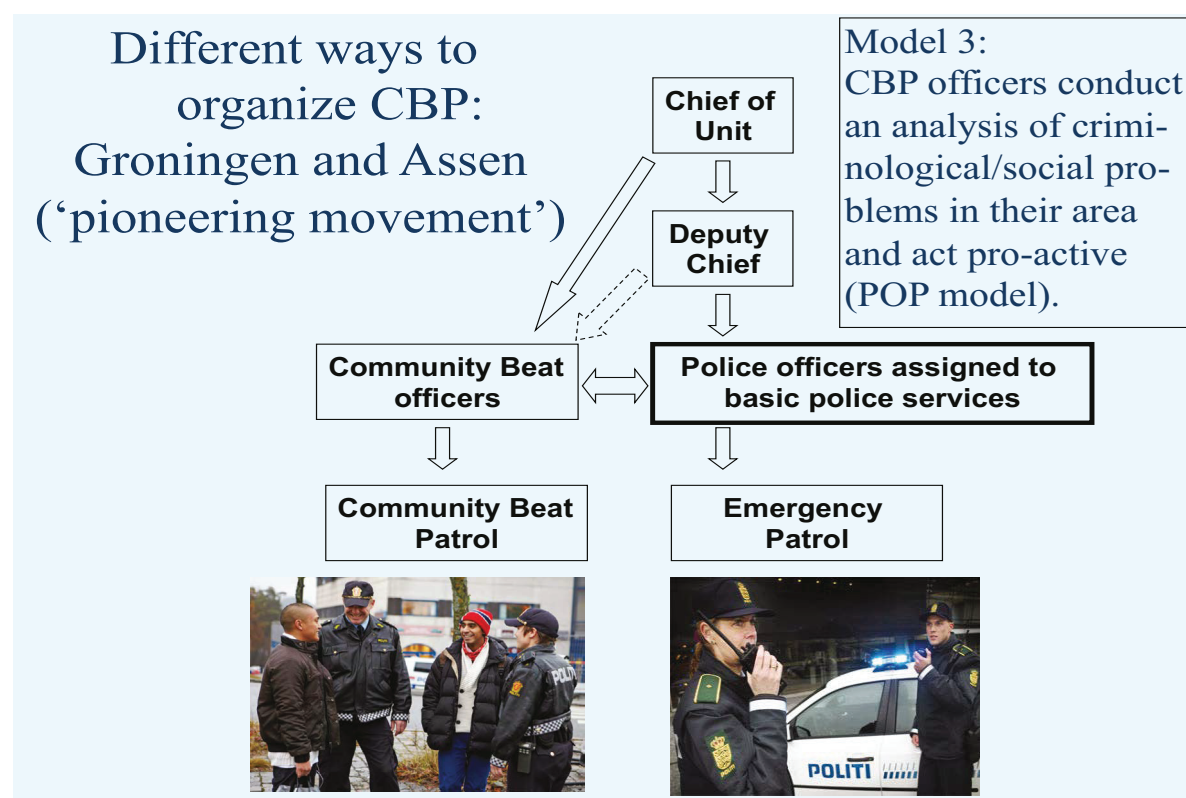




At the top of the organisational chart is the police management in the form of a police chief and a deputy chief. In the centre is the group of officers who are assigned to basic police services such as emergency patrol and community beat patrol. The officers rotate between these tasks. Since, in police culture, emergency patrol is the dominant role of the two, these police officers tend to do community beat policing in

an emergency-patrol style. The results indicate that this way of organising community beat patrol is not the way to successfully implement this style of policing.

The second example is the situation we observed in, among other places, Groningen and Assen, the Netherlands (Model 3).



At the top of this organisational chart is police management. Then there are two different lines travelling top-down. The one on the right is how the emergency patrol is organised, exactly the same as in the example above. The top-down line on the left shows how the community beat patrol is organised. Community beat patrol officers are located directly under the chief of the unit and it is these officers who are assigned to community beat patrol. To assure that the two types of officers cooperate, they have to consult with each other. The idea is that community beat officers inform the others about actual problems that need police attention. Since community beat patrol officers fall directly under the chief of the unit, they are seen as important. The effect of this, however, is that in daily practice no one manages community

beat policing. The deputy chief is not in charge. The chief of the unit is too busy. In everyday practice we observed that community beat officers practice a style of policing that is different from the emergency-patrol style: more towards proactive policing, more towards problem-orientated policing, more towards building relationships between the police and the community. However, there is quite a distance between the two types of officers. It is very difficult for the community beat officers to push the other officers towards another style of policing.

The third and last example shows a variation on the second one. We observed this in the city of Leeuwarden, the Netherlands (Model 4).

## Different ways to organize CBP: Leeuwarden (‘CBP in command’)

**Model 4:**  
Same as 3 – in  
addition to which EP  
officers are put at the  
service of CBP offi-  
cers (full POP model).



The main difference is that this third organisational chart does not have a deputy chief. Instead of this official, the chart shows the position of a community beat officer with executive powers. This community beat officer plays two roles. Firstly, he goes out on patrol, but only now and then since he has another and more important role to fulfil: he runs a group of police officers, and he assigns jobs to them in the sphere of community policing. In this way emergency patrol officers, if we still might call them so, are directed towards a community-policing style of policing. The effect of this is that police officers in Leeuwarden, patrolling the inner city, are less orientated towards traffic violations and more to other problems in the neighbourhood. For example emergency patrol in Leeuwarden consists of only a small proportion of traffic incidents. It is the smallest of all twelve cities in our study. The next-smallest was the one that we have observed in Lillestrom.

## Conclusion

The outcomes of our study illustrate that the tables that constitute our frame of reference, such as the proportion of traffic, are indicators of important features of police patrol work.

What we learned during the course of this study, it that police management is strong on basic assignment — at designing a new organisation and at moving police officers from one department to another. Do we need to do more on youth problems? Just appoint ten more juvenile police officers. Do we want to improve police-citizen relationships? Let's appoint ten more community beat officers. But police management is weak at the next step: basic strategy. What is our idea of community beat policing? What exactly does it mean to be a community beat patrol officer? Of course it is clear that community beat patrol officers should establish and maintain relationships between the police and the public. But police management need to express a clear picture of what a community

beat patrol officer should be doing on a day-to-day basis. How does one do 'community beat policing'? Does a community beat officer have to write tickets? Does he or she visit schools? If so, to do what? Does such an officer walk the beat in uniform? There are so many questions about how one could and should fulfil a certain police role.

If the police want to move from an old-fashioned, reactive style of policing towards community policing or problem-orientated policing, they have to do more than just ask emergency patrol officers to also fulfil the role of community beat officer. And neither is it enough to appoint some officers as community beat officers. Although their patrol work is different, they do not have the power to change the rest of the organisation. Our study indicates that if one really wants to get a different style of policing off the ground,

one should appoint community beat police officers with managerial powers.

We need police management that is capable of giving direction to what police officers do. After all, only then can it be useful to increase police numbers, and only then 'more police officers on the streets' will not automatically mean 'more traffic checks'. Only if basic strategy is clear, is it useful to put 'more blues on the beat'. It is the task of police management to keep the debate going about what are good practices in terms of police activities. It is their task to set goals and to evaluate police effectiveness. Consequently, in the end it is also their task to decide what kind of activities a certain type of police officer should or should not undertake — because police activities are a key factor of police effectiveness.

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