

Perspectives of Community Policing in Greece

Evangelos Stergioulis

Adjunct Faculty in Police Studies, Cyprus Open University



ABSTRACT

This research article studies the implementation of community policing in Greece and the critical impact of severe constraints related to the historical, political and socioeconomic background of the country. Based on an analysis of the main components of the philosophy of community policing, it is explained how this contemporary form of policing can be impeded or even fail if it lacks of a comprehensive strategy with community's active involvement, independency from politics as well as sufficient resources and scientific research in the field. It concludes with main findings in understanding the limited development and progress of community policing in Greece and offers concrete proposals for the improvement of the current situation. The research was based on a quantitative analysis of data on community policing published by the competent state authorities as well as on the study of the relevant but extremely limited academic literature on the issue.

Keywords: community policing, Greek police

Introduction

Community policing has been always considered as the main tool of the overall police function (Demsey & Forst, 2014: 26-30). In the distant past, policing, in the collective consciousness of every society, was mostly perceived as a repressive apparatus used to safeguard the interests of the ruling class by exercising coercion and using legitimate violence to suppress crime and restore order. In the course of time, policing has become more complex, heavily influenced by rapid changes stemming from the consequences of globalization in all areas of social, political and economic life. The evolution of crime coupled with the tremendous progress of new technologies have created a completely new social reality which led the Police to review traditional principles and perceptions on policing. In principle, the Police have progressively abandoned traditional policing that used to focus on suppressing crime and restoring public order and moved to the adoption of a new philosophy of police action based on the active engagement of the community. Policing, both as a function and a process, followed the evolution of society and accordingly adapted to the changes of the sociopolitical conditions (Miller, Hess & Orthmann, 2014: 3-25).

The Philosophy of Community Policing

In police science, policing is widely acknowledged as a process (Cepol, 2007:23). It is composed of two basic parameters. First, it is an officially organized form of social control being part of the overall criminal justice system. Second, it is a process through which a wide range of services are provided to the community not only in the field of crime prevention but also in the broader sector of public safety and order (Stergioulis, 2008:35-41). In this respect, policing is not only affected by police determinants such as police culture, training, organizational and administrative issues, but also by social, political and historical factors embodied in the society's structures and functions (Kelling & Moore, 1988, Seagrave, 1996).

Community policing is indeed a new philosophy of police action. Unlike traditional policing practices, the Police call upon the representatives and the various institutions of the community to be engaged in a continuous dialogue concerning all aspects of public order in the area of the community (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012 :1). The fact that the Police open up its doors to citizens seeking their advice and involvement in policing related matters, policing is instantly transformed into a social process. In essence, community policing promotes a human face of the police institution and changes the Police's image from a state mechanism of repression to an organization providing manifold services in the field of public safety to all citizens without discrimination (Somerville, 2009).

Serving the community on the basis of a constant dialogue in an open and transparent manner and by giving priority to vulnerable individuals and social groups, community policing leads, in the long term, to the establishment of a climate of mutual trust between police and society, which is a prerequisite in combating crime and maintaining public order. The results of relevant surveys on community policing have shown that close co-operation between the Community and the Police increases the level of citizen's satisfaction in the police work, reduces the fear of crime and improves the quality of community's life. (Kappeler & Gaines, 2015:10). Bearing in mind that diversity is the substantial element of the modern society nowadays (Stergioulis, 2017) and that police practices have often prevented ethnic minorities from accessing police services on an equal basis causing tensions and conflicts (Srinivasan & Hearn, 2001), the planning and development of community policing can definitely benefit from the widest possible society's active engagement.

The philosophy of community policing is therefore directly related to major concerns of citizens regarding the protection of their personal safety and property and the maintenance of public order while fully respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms. The engagement of citizens and community's local authorities in planning and implementing community policing, progressively contributes to the social acceptance of policing, which, in turn, it promotes a wider social consensus in police work in preventing crime and safeguarding public order. (Friedman, 1992:15). Community policing can produce positive results when it is developed in a police system governed by autonomy, decentralization, decision-making flexibility, innovative leadership, participatory management, transparency and open procedures (Riechers & Roberg, 1990). In sum, it is a combination of ideological, practical and theoretical elements that all together form the backbone of the philosophy of community policing.

Community Policing in Greece

The Greek Police today

The Greek Police was founded in 1984 as an amalgamation of the two former police organizations, the Greek Gendarmerie and the City Police (Stergioulis, 2001:44). Both police forces had a long history. The Gendarmerie Corps was created in 1833 on the model of the then French Gendarmerie whereas the City Police was established in 1920 on the model of the London Metropolitan Police. The main reasons that led to the unification of the Gendarmerie Corps and the City Police are detailed in the introductory report of the founding law of today's Greek Police (Law 1481/1984) summarized as follows (Stergioulis, 2001:214):

- to adjust police competences to the fulfilment of the mission of the Ministry of Public Order and limit police work strictly to the duties of policing by abolishing any other non-police related activity which used to overwhelm daily police work.

- to improve police and civilian relations as the unpopular use of both police forces in the past had created a climate of mistrust and even hostility between the police and the public.
- to increase the productivity and the efficiency of police officers in combating crime especially the new forms of criminality.
- to improve the educational level of police officers as well as their working conditions.

The foundation of one national police organization took place in a period during which Greece was striving to consolidate democracy after seven years of dictatorship (1967-1974) (Papanicolaou & Rigakos, 2014). At that time, the social and political country's environment was overwhelmed by continuous conflicts between a vast working class seeking to establish its own democratic rights and the ruling class trying to maintain a balance between working demands and fundamental constitutional requirements (Rigakos & Papanicolaou, 2003). The Police was heavily involved in confronting these conflicts by maintaining public order. Most police resources were allocated to safeguarding public order and less in the policing of criminality, which in the 1980s used to fluctuate at low levels (Lambropoulou, 2005). Policing used to be carried out in a traditional manner and seemed to be considered efficient as long as crime rates were kept low. Thus, the concept of community policing at that time was totally unknown in the Greek Police.

At the beginning of the 1990s, policing in Greece entered into a new phase which was deeply affected by the severe consequences that stemmed from the enormous social and political changes in the continent following the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). Bordering, in the north, with countries from the former eastern bloc, Greece was faced with an unprecedented migratory influx which drastically affected all aspects of policing. The traditional police structures were challenged by the sudden increase of criminality throughout the country especially in the urban centers and the increasing threat posed by domestic terrorism (Courakis, 1993). The resulting increase in the workload of central police services along with the increased demands of additional human resources to serve in the front line, gradually led to the disappearance of patrolling officers from neighborhoods.

Over the last decade, the Greek Police have been severely affected by the adverse consequences of the global economic crisis while at the same time crime has been rising with unprecedented and continuing migratory and refugee pressures at country's south eastern borders. It is worth underlining that the aforementioned reasons that led to the foundation of the Greek Police in 1984, are still relevant nowadays and continue to constitute major issues of concern for the Greek Police. In particular:

- the staff of the Greek Police continue to carry out even more work non-related to policing duties. (Pan-Hellenic Federation of Police Officers, 2017).

- criminality has constantly been on rise especially in the period of economic crisis (Tsouvelas, et al. 2015).
- Relations between the Police and the public suffer by continuous conflicts affected by austerity's consequences, the increase of crime and the acute immigration and refugee problem in the everyday life (Zarafonitou, 2011).
- the adverse consequences of the economic crisis have caused an unprecedented deterioration of police working conditions and a critical reduction of police personnel vacancies (Pan-Hellenic Federation of Police Officers, 2015).
- the police training system has not been adjusted to the principles of the Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration, 1999) and the main police educational structures have not been revised since 1994 (Law 2226/1994).

Neighborhood Policing

As common criminality was constantly on rise provoking extensive and critical public discussions on the sensitive issue of urban security (Xenakis, & Cheliotis, 2013) and racist phenomena occurred more frequently in the increasingly diverse society (Antonopoulos, 2006), the Greek Police has realized that the traditional policing styles should be replaced by contemporary forms of policing. To this end, the very first attempt to introduce community policing took place in 2003 by establishing a legal framework of neighborhood policing which sets out the mission and tasks of the neighborhood police officers as follows (Presidential Decree 254/2003):

- The mission of the neighborhood police officer is to approach and communicate with citizens, to consolidate the sense of security, to create mutual trust and cooperation between the police and the local community, to prevent crime and to deal with community's problems related to the police mission.
- Neighborhood police officers patrol daily in the neighborhood being in touch with the inhabitants, the local and social actors, undertake initiatives to resolve police issues and incidents in the area, provide assistance to crime victims and collect crime related information for further police action, participate in events organized by local authorities and in meetings when problems of police nature are discussed, visit the schools in the neighborhood and discuss with the directors, teachers and parents about the existing problems of police nature, recommend and organize lectures in cooperation with neighborhood representatives on crime related issues.

It should be noted that this general and rather descriptive legal provision regulating community policing which is still in place to date, does not foresee anything for the training of police officers who will be assigned to perform the neighborhood policing duties, there is no provision for institutional partnerships with community's representatives and

even more there is no provision for a common strategy with the active participation of the community.

Based on the above legal framework, a pilot phase of implementation of community policing set off on 17 March 2003 in 35 police departments throughout the capital and in 2 police departments in Thessaloniki with a total of 354 police officers involved. Although there has been no evaluation published of this very first phase of neighborhood policing, the fact that it was warmly welcomed by the public and was positively presented through the media (Kathimerini, 2003, Ministry of Public Order, 2003), has led the political leadership to officially announce on 4 June 2003 that community policing would be progressively expanded throughout Greece (Ministry of Public Order, 2003). In spite of political announcements and commitments, the expansion has never taken place and the neighborhood policing was abandoned by the new government elected in the next year's parliamentary elections, in March 2004. One of the main reasons for quitting this very first attempt was the fact that the strategic focus of the Greek Police was concentrated on the security preparations of Olympic Games (2004) (Rodopoulos, 2011), a global event that absorbed the total amount of resources of the Greek Police along with the then assigned neighborhood police officers. However, it should be underlined that there was no strategy by the Greek Police Headquarters on how to proceed with implementing community policing and the political decisions at that time due to the importance and the complexity of organizing the Olympic Games' security have totally overshadowed any other policing priority.

A second attempt for implementing community policing in Greece took place almost six years later, in January 2010. The Ministry of Public Order officially announced that the neighborhood police officers would commence their activities aiming to strengthen security in the neighborhoods of urban centers with an upgraded role. The restart of neighborhood policing occupied 218 police officers at 45 police departments in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra and other major cities focusing on areas which were selected on criteria such as density population, diversity, rates of criminality as well as the extent of willingness of the local communities to collaborate with the Police (Ministry of Citizens' Protection, 2010 a). After a period of six months, in June 2010, an activity report (Ministry of Citizens' Protection, 2010b) was published, the main points of which are summed up as follows:

Neighborhood Police Officers:

- Received 2.166 complaints and requests from citizens for a variety of cases of which 1.576 were directly arranged.
- Recorded 154 cases as focal points for possibly causing criminal actions.

- Spotted 562 places that degraded the neighborhood living environment such as abandoned facilities and vehicles, road safety issues, poor lighting, etc.
- Dealt with 115 school issues.
- Visited 722 domiciles and various places where criminal activities occurred and collected information or supported morally crime victims.
- In 6.745 cases served individuals with health problems or persons needed some kind of administrative assistance from police authority (e.g. ID verification).
- Conducted 47.644 informative visits to various local authorities.
- Delivered 563 lectures on anti-social behavior, school bullying, exploitation of minors, drugs and crime prevention.

This first activity report of community policing in Greece is worthwhile although the outcome is generally presented instead of examining and evaluating the activities of neighborhood policing on the basis of each police precinct in a specific city followed by an analysis based on a number of determinants such as population, density, criminality rates and diversity. The major finding, however, of this activity report is the huge responsiveness of the public with remarks, suggestions and complaints addressed to neighborhood police officers, a fact that highlights an increased interest of citizens to get in touch with the Police. Nevertheless, this second attempt in establishing community policing in Greece came to an end within the same year without any official explanation by the Greek Police Headquarters or by the competent ministry. Again, there has been no strategy and the fact that this second attempt was soon abandoned, clearly indicated impact of political decisions' on local policing.

In the beginning of 2015, national parliamentary elections led to a new government in power and the issue of community policing came back to the foreground. In March 2015, a third effort took place for the establishment of community policing which is in place to date. It was again decided to implement neighborhood policing in a pilot phase of three months' duration in two central police departments in Athens and two others in Thessaloniki. In addition, it was announced that a special scientific committee would be set up in order to submit proposals for improving the efficiency and the effectiveness of neighborhood policing (Ministry of Citizen's Protection, 2015), but the outcome of this special scientific committee has never seen the light of publicity. By the end of the year, neighborhood policing was expanded in total 37 police departments throughout the country (Greek Police Headquarters, 2016).

According to the last published report (Greek Police Headquarters, 2017), neighborhood policing is currently implemented in 37 police departments covering 96 neighborhoods across the country. In particular, in 9 police departments in Athens, in 4 police depart-

ments in Thessaloniki and in 24 other police departments in the rest of country covering 22 cities in total. In the same report, it is mentioned that in 2016 the neighborhood police officers across the country have accomplished in total 151.884 actions and interventions which included informative visits with citizens, meeting requests and solving problems of daily life. They also developed and strengthened partnerships with local authorities (municipalities, schools, associations, churches) and participated in events organized by local authorities. As far as crime prevention is concerned, it is noted that the frequent presence of neighborhood police officers outside bank facilities, have contributed decisively to preventing criminal activities and protected citizens' safe transactions through automatic teller machines (Greek Police Headquarters, 2017). However, since 2015 that neighborhood policing has been implemented in Greece, there has not been any evaluation in respect of the impact of community policing in preventing crime and no joint police-community projects and actions have ever been published.

Local Crime Prevention Councils (LCPCs)

In 1999, an innovative legal framework was introduced in the context of community policing providing for that in every municipality with a population of more than three thousand (3,000) inhabitants, a Crime Prevention Council is established composed of scientists and officials, who reside themselves in the communities and possess special knowledge and expertise in relevant fields of criminal justice such as judicial officers, criminologists, psychologists, sociologists, police officers, social workers etc. The idea behind this initiative was to strengthen communities' efforts in preventing crime and enhancing protection of vulnerable individuals and social groups, thus improving communities' quality life (Zarafonitou, 2003).

The competences of the LCPCs cover a wide range of areas such as drawing up a crime prevention program for their community areas, rendering opinions and advice on relevant questions posed by the mayor, cooperating with the respective LCPCs of neighboring communities, organizing workshops, seminars and other related events aiming at raising public awareness on crime prevention (Law 2713/1999, art.16). This very first attempt of establishing LCPCs has not been successful mainly due to lack of resources and appropriate organization and coordination of the LCPCs' activities. Therefore, a second attempt took place six years later, in 2005, which led to the creation of a central council within the ministry of public order aiming to coordinate the work of the LCPCs across the country. It should be noted that the composition of the central council for the LCPCs is politically influenced as it is composed of eleven (11) members appointed by the minister himself and remunerated under an annual renewable contract, while the members of the LCPCs are appointed by the mayor without any compensation (Law 3387/2005, art.13).

It is worth mentioning that unlike other European countries, the community's participation in voluntary forms of policing has been extremely limited in Greece (Zarafonitou,

2013). The LCPCs constitute the first and the only form of communities' participation in the broader context of preventive policing in the country. In accordance with the Greek Police Headquarters, the LCPCs' aim is the development of an alternative and decentralized crime policy tailored to the particular needs and demands of local communities in close cooperation with local authorities, the police and judicial authorities, the social actors and the citizens themselves who aspire to contribute in the consolidation of public safety in everyday life (Greek Police Headquarters, 2018). However, neither the Greek Police Headquarters nor any of the competent ministries have ever presented a strategy in which the work of the LCPCs is integrated in connection with neighborhood policing nor any annual report of the LCPCs activities and best practices has ever been issued at central level.

In a conference organized at University of Athens in 2006 on the operation of LCPCs with the participation of representatives from local authorities, the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece and the academic community, it was stressed the fact that all LCPCs are underrepresented and malfunction due to lack of resources and the absence of an integrated strategy (Courakis, 2006). In fact, the effectiveness of the LCPCs after seventeen (17) years of operation has not been consolidated and their efficiency within the Greek society is seriously questioned. Research has revealed that the function and the mission of the LCPCs remain little known within the broader society, while there is a high level of citizens' unwillingness to participate in collective actions planned by the LCPCs (Chalkia, 2014). Last but not least, the most significant setback regarding the function of the LCPCs is the fact that the existing legal framework does not provide any kind of nexus between the LCPS and neighborhood policing.

Conclusions

Since its establishment in 1984, the Greek Police has remained heavily politicized and centralized with a semi military-political structure (Papakonstantis, 2003), which allows limited flexibility and discretion in developing and promoting contemporary policing forms. The development of community policing has been deeply affected by politics and by lack of independency of the Greek Police Headquarters to plan and implement a long-term community policing strategy. In addition, there has been a considerable lack of scientific knowledge due to absence of relevant researches in the domain of community policing across the country.

Comparing to other European countries, the introduction and implementation of community policing in Greece has been considerably delayed. In fact, the legal framework regulating community policing was adopted in 2003 but it had not been implemented on a constant basis until 2015. The first two attempts to implement community policing

in Greece, in 2003 and in 2010, have shown encouraging results but none of them lasted more than one year due to lack of political will and of a strategy defining concrete targets with an active role of community's stakeholders.

It is therefore so important nowadays than ever for the Greek Police to strengthen its efforts not only to ensure continuity of community policing but also to expand it throughout the country, thus promoting the human face of the Greek Police and progressively ensuring a broader public consensus in preventive policing.

From a quantitative point of view, the activity reports of community policing in Greece are extremely positive demonstrating not only a high level of citizens' willingness to cooperate with the Police but also an efficient preventive dimension in confronting serious crime such as robberies of citizens during their financial transactions via ATM. However, these activity reports should be subjected to a qualitative evaluation and analysis based on a number of determinants such as the geographical area, density of population, diversity, criminality rate (Cyprus Police, 2017), public awareness and satisfaction, extent of community's engagement, neighborhood police officers' perceptions and recommendations as well as other factors related to police administrative and organizational issues which affect community policing.

Community policing has been implemented in Greece on a consistent basis only over the last three years but it is exceptionally limited both in terms of police departments and police officers involved. As an example, community policing is applied in nine police departments out of 86 police departments in the whole area of Attica. The Greek Police lacks of a strategy on community policing although it has repeatedly announced its commitment to the value of community policing in the field of crime prevention with the support of the local authorities. The role and the participation of the local authorities and other community's stakeholders are not foreseen in a common strategy, while the public itself remains reluctant to be actively engaged and closely cooperate with local police authorities.

The Greek Police has been deeply affected by the consequences of the economic crisis that has plagued the country since 2008 (Vasilaki, R. 2016). As a result, the Greek Police nowadays face a reduction of nearly 6.700 personnel who have either resigned or retired but they have not been replaced. (Pan-Hellenic Federation of Police Officers, 2015). In fact, this huge gap of vacancies combined with extensive police budget financial cuts due to austerity reasons, have led to a reorganization of the Greek Police that took place in 2016 and resulted in reduction of 21% of the total number of police services across the country and in the closure of about 30% of the total number of Attica's police departments (Greek Ministry of Citizen's Protection, 2016b). The consequences of these organizational changes also had an adverse impact on the development of community policing.

Last but not least, it is imperative that the overall function of LCPCs should be reviewed aiming to become effective and efficient by increasing awareness among citizens and enhancing partnerships with local authorities in the crime prevention field. To this end, the LCPCs should be encouraged to establish their own common strategy and implement their own projects in close cooperation with the Police and other competent authorities. Therefore, a nexus should be established between LCPCs and neighborhood policing through an integrated strategy with sufficient scientific support and resources subject to an evaluation system at central level. In this respect, the structure of the existing central coordinating council based in the competent ministry should be reviewed and become independent in its function and accountable directly to a parliamentary committee for ensuring an effective and efficient operation for the benefit of both the Police and the Community.

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