

# Understanding Community Policing

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## **Abstract**

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the paper is to explore, in broad terms, how policing needs to be developed in communities today.

### *Approach*

The approach is normative and analytical, considering the meaning of policing in general, and community policing in particular, and specifying the criteria that such policing has to satisfy in order to be fair and effective in contemporary society.

### *Findings*

A concept of public self-policing is developed and community policing is then evaluated in the light of this concept. Police officers are understood as street-level bureaucrats, with multiple accountabilities. The ideal relationship between police and public is characterised as a structural coupling between two types of self-organising system.

### *Implications*

The paper has implications for how policing organisations and governments might develop improved policing strategies in the future.

### *Value of the paper*

The paper provides a clear, logical summary of thinking about the role of policing, particularly community policing, in today's society. It offers a novel concept of public self-policing, leading to a new approach to the evaluation of the work of policing organisations.

*Keywords:* policing, public, street-level bureaucracy.

*Classification:* Conceptual paper

## **Introduction**

The focus of this paper is primarily normative and exploratory. Its main aim is to understand how policing needs to be developed in communities today. 'Communities' here are understood loosely as those living, working or otherwise interacting in identifiable contexts such as neighbourhoods. Essentially, the argument is that self-policing, structurally coupled with self-regulating policing organisations, is the best (or least worst) way of keeping order in contemporary society. The paper considers empirical evidence on community policing to support its arguments.

Social order can be thought of as a state of affairs where a group of people (however constituted) follow a common set of rules of conduct. Social order is, in its simplest terms, a product of social capital (see Halpern, 2005). It includes Hunter's (1995)

parochial and private orders,<sup>1</sup> as well as the public orders of state and market. The maintenance of social order then refers to the processes by which the shared rules of conduct are established, upheld and enforced (see Crawford and Newburn, 2002, p 480). This maintenance is called ‘policing’, whatever the context – family, community, market or state (see Loader, 2000, p 334). Policing is therefore carried out by a wide variety of individuals and organisations, not just the public police. Policing can then be interpreted, *pace* Crawford *et al.* (2005, p. 4) as ‘intentional action involving the conscious exercise of power or authority (by an individual or organisation) that is directed towards rule enforcement, the promotion of order or assurances of safety.’

The argument of this paper has three main components:

- 1) The development of a concept of public *self-policing*, whereby order is maintained by the people themselves. This can occur in two main ways: the rules of conduct can be unstated, implicit or presupposed, as in the case of the activities of people going about their everyday business, observing the behaviour of themselves and others, and occasionally taking corrective action. Or, exceptionally, the rules can be made explicit, agreed among the people and collectively accepted as binding upon them.
- 2) Self-policing is *limited*, in a number of respects. It may fail to protect individuals and minorities within a community, its rules of conduct may fall short of more widely accepted ethical standards, or it may lack the capacity to deal with more serious breaches of its rules. Independent *policing organisations* are therefore required to maintain order in certain cases.
- 3) These policing organisations need to interact cooperatively with the public, maintaining a balance between their role as impartial enforcers of law and order and their role as supporters of the community’s self-policing. As *street-level bureaucrats*, they have multiple accountabilities, which have to be managed *democratically*.

It is not the intention of this paper to assess all the various theories of policing. Rather, the purpose is to develop a concept of public self-policing and then to revisit approaches to policing in the light of this development.

### **Public self-policing**

The term ‘informal social control’ is commonly used to refer to the maintenance of order by members of the public or of a particular community. Silver and Miller (2004, p.553), for example, define it as the ‘willingness of neighborhood residents to actively engage in behaviors aimed at preventing criminal and deviant behavior in the local area’. Such activity, however, is not necessarily informal, nor is it appropriately characterised as ‘social control’.

It was Jane Jacobs (1961) who first pointed out that routine surveillance by people going about their daily business tended to reduce the incidence of transgressive, anti-social or criminal behaviour (see also Shotland and Goodstein, 1984). For this reason,

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<sup>1</sup> The private order is based on the family and informal primary groups; the parochial order refers to the networks of local institutions such as local shops, schools, churches and community associations.

she advocated the mixed use of public space, in order to maximise the number of eyes and ears of the public engaged in this practice. The explanation for her findings could be that potential transgressors are deterred by the risk, however slight,<sup>2</sup> that others might intervene or might bear witness against them later on, or perhaps by the shame that might be attached to being seen as a transgressor. This would mean that the effectiveness of such action by others depends upon the response to it in terms of individual self-policing, whether 'self' here is understood in terms of a rational self (calculating the balance of risk and reward) or in terms of an ethical self (concerned with protecting and enhancing one's sense of self-value or self-esteem, as well as the esteem with which one is held by others).

Later, Jacobs' insight was 'explained' in a different way, in terms of what is called 'routine activities theory' (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Felson, 1998). According to this theory, crime (and, by extension, other forms of transgression) is largely the result of three factors coming together: a likely transgressor, a suitable target (or victim) and the absence of effective intermediaries either to 'handle' the transgressor or to 'guard' the target or victim. In Jacobs' scenarios, members of the public act mainly as guardians of the public space (which includes all kinds of potential targets and victims), though they may also at times intervene in order to 'handle' potential or actual transgressors (e.g. challenging strangers, and 'have-a-go' heroes). This approach therefore highlights the importance to social order of having effective intermediaries.

But what makes for effective intermediaries? Understandably, people are prepared to challenge strangers, step forward as witnesses, and so on, only where they feel confident of their own safety and a reasonable level of trust in criminal justice institutions. Effective intermediation requires: 'trusting others in the sure knowledge that they won't be let down or disillusioned' (Shaftoe, 2004, p 201). 'Informal social control' therefore depends crucially on trust, which can be understood in Luhmann's (1986) terms as the willingness to assume risk.

Mutual monitoring and a willingness to intervene founded on confidence and trust are therefore key ingredients of 'informal social control'. Strictly speaking, however, as Misztal (2000) has shown, such processes are not purely informal because they involve a balance between formality and informality, specifically between the informality of mutual monitoring and surveillance and the formality of codes of behaviour embedded in public and institutional cultures. Nor does it seem appropriate to describe such processes as involving 'social control', insofar as the latter appears to imply that certain individuals or a group of them (namely, the so-called 'law-abiding') are controlling other individuals or groups (namely, 'deviants' of some kind), whereas here it is a case of everyone controlling everyone else. For these reasons, it may be better to call this 'self-governance' (Kooiman, 2003, p 83) or self-regulation. Self-

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<sup>2</sup> Field studies involving staged crimes (e.g. Latane and Darley, 1970) have shown that bystanders do not generally intervene where transgressions (assaults, damage to property, dropping litter, etc) are taking place, because they have difficulty in, firstly, noticing the incident, then interpreting it as a crime, and finally, in intervening to provide help (e.g. because of the risk of harm to themselves). Evidence also indicates that crime is reduced by people willing to act to challenge strangers, supervise youths, and step forward as witnesses (Shotland and Goodstein, 1984). Understandably, this is less likely to happen in less stable areas (Skogan, 1990).

policing can then be understood as a type or aspect of self-governance or self-regulation.

But what is the 'self' here? What is the public that is policing itself? Harris (2006, p 63) shows that readiness to intervene when a rule is breached is related to many different factors, including whether the perpetrators of the breach are known to the witness or whether the witness is known to them; whether it occurs in the witness's own immediate neighbourhood (Harris, 2006, p 64); whether fellow bystanders are seen as people like them (Levine et al., 2002, p 3); whether the authorities are perceived as responsive, effective, supportive or trustworthy (Silver and Miller, 2004, p 558); the perceived risk of harm to themselves; and the perception of one's own responsibility/duty or of the value of intervening (Hawdon et al., 2003; Barnes and Baylis, 2004, p 101).

This body of evidence suggests that key conditions for intervening include not only having trust in one's fellows and in the authorities (balanced against a judgment of the likely costs and benefits of intervening) but also having a certain social status or reputation in a community and responsibilities associated with that status. The public that is being policed is not something spatially or socially fixed but varies according to the nature of the relations among its members, as well as according to the relations its members have with external authorities. This finding suggests that self-policing may have certain limitations as a way of maintaining social order. These are considered in the next section of the paper.

### **The need for policing organisations**

Self-policing, therefore, defined as a process in which a public polices itself through routine and largely unorganised mutual monitoring and surveillance, with a general readiness to intervene to counter transgressions (and to support victims), is necessary for maintaining order.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, a number of important drawbacks to self-policing, which limit its effectiveness for a just and peaceful society. These drawbacks occur where publics or communities are dominated by criminal gangs, whose rule is typically reinforced by an 'anti-grassing' culture (so that criminal activities such as drug-dealing go unchecked or even condoned – see, for example, Flint, 2002, or Shiner et al, 2004<sup>4</sup>), where members of the public take the law into their own hands (that is, vigilantism), where social relations are highly unstable (so mutual trust is lacking and social statuses are not mutually recognised), and where communities are deeply illiberal, unequal, hierarchical or divided, for example along racial lines.<sup>5</sup> Self-policing is also inherently limited to the extent that it is dependent upon policing by others to deal with problems that cannot be ordinarily solved by members of the public going about their everyday business (e.g. serious and violent crime). Finally, a reliance on self-policing alone for the maintenance of social order

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<sup>3</sup> Even if the intervention is only to report the transgression to a public policing agency – because otherwise the latter are unlikely to be aware of the transgression.

<sup>4</sup> See also Reynolds (1986), Hagan and McCarthy (1997), Walklate and Evans (1999), Page (2000), Hancock (2001), Bottoms and Wiles (2002), Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce (2004, pp 9-10) and Karn (2005).

<sup>5</sup> One might imagine that factors such as authoritative parenting, job stability, strong social ties and peer influences would serve the cause of self-policing but this has not been established, either theoretically or empirically.

would be unfair because some communities are less able to police themselves than others, and these tend to be ones that are poorer and suffer more from problems of crime and disorder (Scott, 2002).<sup>6</sup>

For all these reasons, there is a need for independent, impartial policing organisations, dedicated to the maintenance of social order, and structurally coupled with different forms of self-policing. This means that such policing by ‘others’ has to vary according to the conditions that obtain in different communities.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, this can happen only if those who are doing the policing have the knowledge and understanding of those conditions and the skills to work with those communities in the co-production of social order – in other words, some form of community policing. The next section considers what form this might take.

### **Community policing**

There are numerous definitions of community policing but they appear to have three common features: police-community partnerships, a problem-solving approach, and organisational decentralisation (see Oliver, 1998, pp 32-43; see also Community Policing Consortium, 1994). Oliver’s (1998, p 51) definition seems most comprehensive:

A systematic approach to policing with the paradigm of instilling and fostering a sense of community, within a geographical neighborhood, to improve the quality of life. It achieves this through the decentralization of the police and the implementation of a synthesis of three key components: (1) ... the redistribution of traditional police resources; (2) ... the interaction of police and all community members to reduce crime and the fear of crime through indigenous proactive programs; and (3) ... a concerted effort to tackle the causes of crime problems rather than to put band-aids on the symptoms.

To this should be added the argument that policing is a concern not just for the police in interaction with communities but also for other agencies with responsibilities for preventing and reducing crime – what Jones and Newburn (2002) have called secondary agencies of crime control.<sup>8</sup>

Considering Oliver’s definition, it seems clear that the key feature of community policing is interaction between policing organisations and communities. The other

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<sup>6</sup> In an increasing number of countries, public self-policing has become more difficult in recent years, due to factors such as increased economic and population instability, poor urban design, and the rise of gated communities.

<sup>7</sup> Numerous commentators have observed how the efforts of the public police can weaken self-policing – see in particular Bursik and Grasmick (1993) and Renauer (2007, p 62). Where such self-policing is causing harm, however, it may be necessary to weaken it as a preliminary to achieving more ethical forms of self-policing.

<sup>8</sup> Much of the rise in crime in late twentieth century Britain has been attributed to a reduction in secondary control activities: ‘There has been a marked decrease in employment in a range of occupations providing “natural surveillance” and other low level controls as a corollary to their primary functions’ (Jones and Newburn (2002, p 140), and this decline is ‘implicated in the rise in levels of crime’ (Jones and Newburn, 2002, p 142). This finding has clear policy implications in terms of revitalising ‘natural surveillance’ occupations, such as park keepers, rent collectors, neighbourhood wardens, etc.

two features are secondary, in that the purpose of the decentralisation is to achieve more effective interaction, and the interaction itself includes forms of joint problem-solving. What is less clear, however, is the nature of the interaction that is envisaged, and how policing organisations are supposed to instil and foster a sense of community is not made clear at all.<sup>9</sup>

Let us first analyse what co-production might mean.<sup>10</sup> It suggests something more than consultation, where policing organisations may canvass the public's views but then decide for themselves the best course of action to take. Rather, it implies that policing decisions will be taken jointly, in an arena or forum of some kind where policing organisations and publics are represented. This raises questions, however, about the nature of such forums, how they are set up, how the different parties are represented in them, what authority the participants have to ensure that forum decisions are implemented, how the decision-makers are held to account for their decisions, and what happens in the event of failure to reach agreement on policing priorities, strategy or tactics. Where a public lacks representation, **its capacity needs to be built if it is to become an effective partner. Such capacity-building, however, would** take the police in particular well beyond their traditional role of law enforcement (Mastrowski et al., 1995, p 540). It should also be noted that co-production relates not only to decision-making processes but also to the implementation and evaluation of decisions made, e.g. regular communications from the police to the public and regular feedback from the public to the police about community conditions and the effectiveness of policing interventions.

Reviews of the literature on community policing suggest that the evidence for its impact on communities is mixed and the interpretation of that evidence is fraught with difficulties (Greene and Taylor, 1988; Cordner, 1998; Rosenbaum et al., 1998). In an assessment of six community policing programmes across the US, for example, Skogan (1994) found that fear of crime was reduced in all of them, and communities' favourable assessments of police services either remained the same or increased compared with similar communities not receiving these services. In particular, Skogan (1994, p 180) noted that: 'Where officers have developed sustained cooperation with community groups and fostered self-help, the public has witnessed declining levels of social disorder and physical decay.' Later, Skogan and Hartnett's (1997) assessment of community policing in Chicago suggested that it had a significant impact on community problems and the quality of community life.

Many, perhaps most, community policing initiatives, however, not only in the US but across the world, do not appear to be systematically linked to community development or crime prevention, so positive community impacts are hard to find. Indeed, some commentators, such as Brogden and Nijhar (2005), have argued that in most areas in most countries the impacts of introducing community policing have been harmful, mainly because they take no account either of local community

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<sup>9</sup> Some commentators consider this ideal of community policing to be unrealistic and undesirable. For example: 'COPS [Community-Oriented Policing Service] officers can hardly be expected to grow community where none exists even if they can overcome the suspicion or overt hostility of many of the people who live there. Moreover, even if community could be imposed top-down, to try to do so would violate the COPS philosophy' (Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce, 2004, p 9).

<sup>10</sup> In relation to policing, the term 'coproduction' seems to have been first used by Skolnick and Bayley (1988).

conditions (in particular how communities police themselves) or the state of local police forces (who are frequently corrupt, violent, feared, hated and/or despised).<sup>11</sup> On the positive side, however, where community policing has the effect of increasing the perceived legitimacy of the police, the maintenance of social order is likely to improve (see list of references in Renauer, 2007, p 64).<sup>12</sup> There is also evidence that self-policing ‘can be enhanced by bringing police and residents closer together, particularly through police-resident collaborations or partnerships’ (Renauer, 2007, p 63 – see list of references).

Considering forums and beat meetings in particular, Bayley (1994) found that they varied greatly in their composition. Some represented geographical communities and others interest groups (shopkeepers, ethnic minorities, gays, business users, etc). They had four main functions: advising the police about local needs and priorities; helping police educate other citizens about crime and disorder and enlist the cooperation of the public in this; allowing residents to ventilate grievances against the police and permitting the police to respond directly; and providing information to the police about the relative success of the latter’s efforts. It is important to note that none of these involved joint decision-making between police and public. Similarly, Skogan (2005, p 17, cited in Renauer, 2007, p 66) characterised some of Chicago’s police beat meetings as ‘laundry meetings’, in which residents air their problems (‘drop off their shirts’), the police state they will look into them, and at later meetings residents listen to police reports of what they have done. Again, this means that residents are not involved in the development of solutions to their problems or in how those solutions might be implemented. This can undermine self-policing by making residents too dependent on policing organisations for solving their problems.

A further criticism is that only a small minority of residents are actively involved in community forums, and they may not be representative of the community as a

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<sup>11</sup> Evidence from around the world, including countries in Europe, Africa, the Indian sub-continent and Latin America, suggests that ‘community policing is, at best, unproven practice. At worst, it is simply a practice that reinforces existing schisms and inequalities’ (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 161). In the UK, for example, community policing does not really exist. The initiatives that come closest to it are the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) and, from 2008, the creation of neighbourhood policing teams in all police authority areas. The former aims to deliver dedicated high-visibility police, making officers more accessible, familiar and responsive to local residents, and increasing the quality and quantity of community intelligence (Crawford et al, 2005, p 10). Evaluation to date suggests that it is generally supported by members of the public and can produce a modest increase in linking social capital (Singer, 2004). Crawford and Lister (2004, pp viii-ix) report ‘a reasonably well established mixed economy of residential patrols’, with different foci (engaging local residents, improving the environment, or concentrating directly on incidents or ‘hotspots’) and different styles of policing (emphasising enforcement, patrol or problem solving through partnerships). However, Crawford and Lister (2004, p viii) also state that there is a lack of coordination among the different providers of reassurance policing and unclarity about their different boundaries, roles, responsibilities, and limitations, which can leave the public uncertain about the identity, functions and powers of different policing providers and unsure what can legitimately be expected of them. There appears to be no clear strategic approach to community engagement, and little understanding of the ‘levels’ and potential complexity of such engagement. For example, none of the four ‘models’ of plural policing identified by Crawford et al (2005, pp 89-90) defines a clear role for the community in defining the type of policing provision, in planning how this type of policing will be provided, or even in its day-to-day operations.

<sup>12</sup> Legitimacy is of course important for effective policing of any kind – see, for example, Ballintyne and Fraser (2000, p 173), Hancock (2001, p 150).

whole.<sup>13</sup> As Brogden and Nijhar (2005, p 54) note: ‘All the evidence on community policing forums is that they tend to reflect only a minority view of the locale, that members increasingly see themselves as acting on behalf of policing interests, and that other minorities as well as some majorities are rarely involved in the forum deliberations.’ Van den Broek (2002) points out that new multi-agency networks (such as crime and disorder reduction partnerships in England) may actually reduce community participation, so that:

Police end up relying on self-appointed representatives to identify problems and concerns for the rest of the community. Even when police encourage wider participation, such invitations are rarely accepted partly because of traditional police-minority hostile relations and partly because of the historical disenfranchisement and marginalisation of groups such as lower class young people.

(Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 55).

Although community policing initiatives have achieved some improvements in policing in certain areas, therefore, it does not seem to be the case that any community has gained ‘ownership’ over policing by this means – or, if they have, the ‘owners’ represent only a minority of the community. Where police-community partnerships exist, they cannot be said to be of equals because it is the police who make all the real decisions. This is perhaps most clear in the studies of ‘Weed and Seed’ in Seattle (see Lyons, 1999). Here community development was subordinated to a crime control agenda that stemmed from the federal government not from the public: ‘If community members want the police to engage in an activity that is not on the police agenda (because it is not cost effective, because it does not strengthen police organisation, because it limits police discretion, under-utilizes police manpower, and so on) they may have little potential to challenge the practical decision-makers’ (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 74).

Consequently, Brogden and Nijhar (2005) argue that community policing is an ideology or set of powerful myths (see also Robin, 2000, and Manning, 2004),<sup>14</sup> which resonates well with the ‘new public management’ of public services – essentially, it is a way of delivering policing products to an increasingly diverse community of consumers.<sup>15</sup> Rather than being a systematic adaptation to this

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Rowe (2004) on how so-called ‘community leaders’ can be out of touch with their communities.

<sup>14</sup> Manning (2004) argues that the police engage in a form of magic, in that they mimic or simulate religion (specialised costumes, roles, equipments, rituals and beliefs) but stand apart from their fellow human beings. Collectively, they are both sacrificers (as enforcers of the law) and sacrificial victims (e.g. the ‘thin blue line’). It is only through sacrificing themselves that they maintain connection to ordinary society.

<sup>15</sup> In the UK, for example, the general emphasis of recent governmental approaches to policing has been on developing active citizens, active consumers (of private security) and active communities, with individuals, organisations and communities being increasingly expected to assume responsibility for managing their own crime risks, while policing organisations are increasingly expected to support that management by being responsive and contractually accountable to individuals, organisations and communities (Crawford, 1997; Loader, 2000, p 331; Spalek, 2008, p 94). There has been a double shift in focus, from the public police to plural policing and from political to contractual governance (Crawford, 2003; Lister, 2006). At the same time, there has been a widening of the state’s net of social control, with the enlisting of individuals, organisations and communities in the service of policing objectives (with, for example, increasing powers of policing being made available to local

changing environment, however, it seems to be in most cases a method of strategic buffering of the traditional core police mandate of crime control (Zhao, 1996). 'Community-oriented policing is an excellent PR tool for an organisation that cannot "solve crime" but which seeks to assure the community that it is "doing something".' (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 78). In practice, what happens is that:

... the police determine the nature of the community, its problems, and how such problems should be responded to. Other community problems – unemployment, bad housing, poor health facilities, and so on – are now constructed as second order problems. Recognising the latter as a greater priority than crime, or as the real cause of crime, would diminish the police autonomy and authority in determining communal social order and communal values. It precludes intervention by non-police agencies. Community policing allows the police to coordinate those other agencies under its own banner and leadership to solve its definition of the priority of community problems.

(Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 65)

The result of such strategic buffering is that traditional law enforcement goes on much as before: 'The same "miscreants" are "moved on" on the streets, the same groups of youths end up in custody, and the same middle class citizens have their views of law and order reaffirmed' (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 79).

In general, community policing initiatives take little care to ensure that police beats correspond to 'natural' communities (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997); they ignore and even exacerbate issues of conflict, diversity and difference (Boostrom, 2000), and ignore issues of institutional representation, participation and democracy (Mastrowski, 1988); they tend 'to empower those who want more policing at the expense of others who may justifiably expect more control over the police' (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 55); they legitimise the penetration of communities by powerful government agencies, increasing the relative power of the police among these agencies, and thereby weakening the democratic rule of law (Bayley, 1994); and they work best where they are least needed, that is in homogeneous communities with little crime where support for the police is almost universal, and worst where they are most needed, that is in heterogeneous or divided communities and the poorest communities, where crime is high and support for the police is lowest (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, pp 61-2).

In all, therefore, the evidence on community policing in practice, with the possible exception of a small number of cities in the US, is far from encouraging. The main problems seem to be that police forces remain unchanged as command and control structures dedicated to law enforcement and crime fighting, that their accountability to communities remains vague and very much at the discretion of the police themselves, that the role and potential of community self-policing are not understood or taken

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communities), but also a narrowing of the net's mesh, with increasing managerialisation and new disciplinary mechanisms, such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which increase the state's regulation of public space (Brown, 2004). In general, 'new public management' seeks to replace accountability to the *users* of relevant services (the 'public' in the sense of a living, breathing population) with accountability to whoever is *paying* for the relevant services (ultimately, this is the taxpayer – an abstract general 'public').

seriously by policing agencies, and that communities are not being developed so that they can work effectively with policing agencies.<sup>16</sup> These problems are addressed in the next section of this paper.

### **Community policing as street-level bureaucracy**

For community policing to work, there needs to be a better balance of the multiple accountabilities of community policing agents. The current situation is described by Brogden and Nijhar (2005, p 57) as follows:

Police agencies define the parameters of what matters are relevant to community accountability and have the means to enforce their determination of the limits of that community influence. In doing so, community policing provides a chimera of accountability. It may legitimate police determination of community goals and priorities, bypassing conventional democratic channels with a more direct interactional relationship rather than opening up new avenues and opportunities for democratic accountability (Klockars, 1988).

This section argues that community police agents are an example of street-level bureaucrats and considers how the literature on street-level bureaucracy can be used to clarify how community policing should be organised.

Street-level bureaucrats were originally characterised by Lipsky (1980) as workers who have high degrees of discretion (or freedom of action) in the organisation of their work, which involves the discharge of public duties and powers including the delivery of services, the dispensation of benefits and the allocation of public sanctions. Street-level bureaucrats see themselves as professionals, who can be trusted to have the necessary expertise to do their jobs, which they define more in terms of relationships than rules. Their relationships with the public, however, are typically asymmetrical because they have specific resources available that the public does not.

Street-level bureaucrats can be held to account in three different directions: vertically upwards, through political or administrative hierarchies, based on legal authority and implemented through task-oriented enforcement or indicator-oriented performance; horizontally, through forms of peer review and collective self-regulation, based on expertise and implemented through professionalised networks; and vertically 'downwards', through forms of participatory citizenship, based on democratic values and implemented through impact-oriented co-production. Hupe and Hill (2007) argue that street-level bureaucrats practise multiple accountability and the form that accountability takes varies according to four factors: the core issue; the character of the relationships between accountors and accountees; the role of the citizen; and the type of 'accountability regime' (based on the modes of implementation mentioned above) (Hupe and Hill, 2007, p 292).

Applying these ideas to policing practice, core issues can be identified such as the detection or prevention of crime, the enforcement of public order, responsiveness to public demands or the assurance of community safety. Each issue involves different

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<sup>16</sup> These problems are indicative of problems with public sector services generally – see, for example, Seddon (2008).

balances of accountabilities, with emphases on different kinds of enforcement, performance and co-production. Each approach to policing gives priority to a particular direction of accountability: traditional law enforcement stresses accountability upwards, problem-oriented policing favours the expertise and judgment of one's fellow officers, while community policing emphasises co-production between police and community.

For Hupe and Hill (2007, p 294), co-production involves individual compliance with internalised professional standards, organisational conformity to shared goals, relationships of trust between accountors and accountees, and citizen voice in holding to account. In the case of community policing, this means that individual policing agents<sup>17</sup> have to be allowed to develop their own ways of working in partnership with community members, that their organisations have to work with communities to agree on common aims and objectives for community policing, that communities and police have to learn to trust each other, and that all citizens need to be included in police-community forums.

The implications of this analysis are profound. It appears that, for co-production of social order to work, at least three conditions must be satisfied. First, each public or set of publics has to operate as a self-organised system, in which order is maintained through the spontaneous interaction between members of the public; second, each policing organisation or set of policing organisations has to function as a separate self-regulating system, in which the rules are defined by the police as street-level bureaucrats acting individually and collectively; and third, self-organised or self-regulating systems of publics on the one hand and policing organisations on the other have to be structurally coupled so that each couple (for example, a public and a policing organisation) itself forms a co-ordination system.

To illustrate this, consider what must happen in a neighbourhood where crime is high but trust in the police is low. The community is likely to be divided so that self-policing is relatively ineffective. Policing organisations are also likely to be ineffective, not least because the community's distrust of them renders them unable to gather the intelligence needed to maintain order in the area. In this situation, police reform on its own cannot be adequate to solve the problem. What must happen simultaneously are processes that raise the quality of the community's self-policing and processes that transform policing organisations into networks of self-regulating teams. The prospects for such a development depend crucially on strategic political decisions about the development and resourcing of such communities.

Processes that improve self-policing can be broadly characterised as involving activities of community development in a wide sense. This includes building forms of human and social capital, collective efficacy, resilience, capacity, self-help, etc. These processes all involve the building and strengthening of co-operative interaction. For the maintenance of social order, key styles of such interaction are civility and sociability (Misztal, 2000). The relationship between such styles and high-crime, low-trust communities, however, is complex and little understood. It is possible, for

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<sup>17</sup> Note that the term 'policing agencies' does not just mean police forces but includes a range of other bodies with a policing function, particularly local authorities (e.g. social services, education, development control, trading standards, environmental health, etc), housing organisations and, increasingly, private security firms.

example, that levels of civility and sociability might actually be quite high in such communities – notorious gangsters might act quite civilly to one another and sociability can be very strong not only within a criminal gang but also between gang members and their local community – while at the same time members of different gangs are shooting and murdering one another. In this case, ‘low trust’ characterises the relationship between community members and policing organisations, and between gangs, but not relationships within certain sections of the community (gangs, tribes, elites, in-groups, cliques, etc).<sup>18</sup> At the other extreme, it is possible that levels of civility and sociability might be very low in a low-crime, high-trust community, where people ‘keep themselves to themselves’ but are very trusting of policing organisations.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, each community has to be assessed individually in order for it to be possible to select appropriate plans of community development action – that is, to decide whether to focus more on improving civility and sociability (e.g. with an emphasis on things like garbage, faeces, noise, public drinking and forming community groups) or on correcting forms of ‘false’ civility and sociability such as those associated with organised criminal activity and structural inequality (see Somerville, 2009). A significant complicating factor here is that undertaking such assessments and planning requires participation by appropriate individuals and organisations (not only policing organisations) from outside the community. A variety of expertise, for example, is required for such an undertaking – in such fields as economic development, housing, healthcare, family support, social regeneration, neighbourhood management and planning, open space and recreational management, transport planning and management, etc.

Processes affecting policing organisations are concerned centrally with how such organisations can be transformed from quasi-military or paramilitary hierarchies into decentred non-hegemonic networks. In terms of the three lines of accountability, this means a downgrading of upwards accountability and a correspondingly increased emphasis on horizontal and downwards accountability. As with public self-policing, however, it is not sufficient to rely on the self-regulation of policing organisations. Horizontal self-regulation, for example, through professional codes of ethics and quasi-judicial procedures, has never been proved to provide adequate protection for service users from discrimination and abuse or to protect the public from malpractices.<sup>20</sup> All three lines of accountability therefore need to be retained, but upwards accountability needs to be not so much to senior policing officials as to properly constituted democratic bodies who are responsible for making the laws that policing organisations enforce and for monitoring and scrutinising their

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<sup>18</sup> Contrast this with the so-called ‘broken windows’ scenario, which assumes a positive relationship between, on the one hand, incivilities and social disorganisation and, on the other, high crime and low trust.

<sup>19</sup> It follows that, for the purposes of policing, the degree of social and cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity of a community is less important than the forms of interaction that occur within the community and between its members and representatives of organisations from outside it.

<sup>20</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the police where officers have long been recruited, trained, promoted and socialised in terms of what has been seen as their primary function of public ordering and security on behalf of the state, requiring specific law enforcement skills (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, p 77).

implementation.<sup>21</sup> Such bodies exist on a number of geographical scales – not only national but also local and regional (and, in the case of Europe, continental). Each decentralised policing team could then be answerable to a local democratic authority, and networks of policing teams could be accountable to higher democratic authorities.

In a high-crime, low-trust scenario, because of the greater priority attached to crime fighting and traditional law enforcement and the greater difficulty of accounting for their actions to the public, policing organisations will tend to rely more on accountability upwards. Police officers on the ground will be given little discretion to act as they see fit, and bureaucracy will exist only above and not at the street level. In this scenario, policing is likely to fail unless and until trust is developed between police and public, and developing such trust requires policing organisations to work in new ways, e.g. building contacts and networks with key figures in the community, showing public commitment to a broad spectrum of community development activity, and learning to understand the community's own policing priorities.<sup>22</sup>

Downwards accountability of police organisations to the public is to be achieved primarily through processes of a third kind, which couple policing organisations with public self-policing. This coupling is structured through relatively stable cooperative interaction at a number of different levels – strategic, tactical and individual. At each level, there are processes of joint decision-making and coordinated action. For example, at an individual level, members of policing organisations will interact with members of the public in a variety of ways such as receiving telephone calls, encounters while patrolling, conducting inquiries, participating in meetings, etc. At this level, decisions are mostly made by the individual members of policing organisations (the street-level bureaucrats) but coordination is achieved, for example, where police respond to crime reports, where problems are jointly identified and followed up, or where members of the public actively cooperate with police investigations. At a tactical level, neighbourhood or beat policing teams might work with local community groups on a variety of community building and community safety issues. At this level, there is more scope for joint decision-making though it is likely that most activities will be more accurately characterised as consultation and joint learning. At a strategic level, policing organisations might work within multi-agency partnerships involving a variety of public, private and voluntary sector organisations. At this level, joint decision-making processes are more predominant but at the same time communities are likely to be a more junior partner in such processes. Overall, even this relatively sketchy analysis suggests that the structural coupling of public self-policing with self-organised but democratically accountable policing organisations is likely to be a complicated, uncertain, unpredictable affair. A new breed of professional worker is required, capable of responding flexibly to different sets of circumstances, upholding the law yet also serving the community.

It is important to note that street-level bureaucracy or co-policing is distinct not only from traditional law enforcement but also from the Chinese 'mass line' principle

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<sup>21</sup> The key guiding principle here, both for self-policing and for policing organisations, is compliance with the letter and spirit of the law, particularly as it relates to fundamental democratic citizenship rights.

<sup>22</sup> In such communities, the police are forced to operate in a different way, e.g. through the use of professional witnesses, the provision of witness support and protection programmes, etc. (Flint, 2006), all of which is time-consuming and expensive, and does not produce results in every case.

(Wong, 2000, p 13). According to this principle, ‘mass struggle and self-criticism, not legal norms and judicial process, is used in ordering society’ (Wong, 2000, p 17, referring to Brady, 1982), ‘all correct leadership is necessarily “from the masses, to the masses”.’ (Wong, 2000, p 17), and: ‘The police and the people are not separable’ (Wong, 2000, p20). The problem with this principle is that it blurs the boundary between public self-policing and policing by policing organisations, resulting in a loss of due process (e.g. the practice of show trials) and the violation of human rights. What needs to be remembered is that, although the police are also members of the public, their role as police officers is different from their role as citizens. Not only are the systems of public self-policing and policing organisations distinct, but their distinctness is necessary if the public is to be protected from itself.

Just because the police as law enforcers need to be set apart from the public, this does not mean that they should be above the public. Unfortunately, the realities of social inequality are such that the police generally provide a better service to more powerful sections of the public – i.e. while not being above the public as a whole, they do appear to be positioned above certain groups, who tend to be poorer, non-white, etc. Such injustice cannot be corrected through police reform alone, but only through a wider redistribution of power and resources. Fair community policing cannot be fully achieved until such redistribution occurs. **This is a major point concerning the political feasibility of achieving ethical community policing, which needs to be developed in a separate article.**

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to clarify a number of ideas that are relevant for community policing. First, it explored the nature of public self-policing, an idea that was originally outlined by Jane Jacobs. The idea needs further work but at the heart of the argument is the principle that the public can, should and does police itself in a variety of ways that are still not well understood. Nevertheless, we understand enough to say that public self-policing has inherent limitations, in that it assumes the existence of high levels of trust, stable social relations, mutual acceptance of social statuses, and a general expectation of law-abiding behaviour. Where such features are absent, there arises a need for policing organisations of different kinds suited to the relevant communities.

This finding leads naturally to a discussion of community policing, understood as policing by an organisation that is distinct from the community yet gives high priority to interaction with the community. The paper therefore went on to evaluate the evidence on community policing, mainly from the perspective of the effect of such policing on the community. This also seems to be unfinished business, as it turns out that community policing remains largely untried, in that high priority is almost never given to the community. In most areas in most countries, whether they be ‘close to the community’ or not, the police remain a law unto themselves.

The paper then attempted to make sense of this by conceptualising community policing as a form of street-level bureaucracy. By juggling multiple accountabilities (to their bosses, to the law, to their colleagues and to the public), police officers, like other street-level bureaucrats, are able to turn many potentially unfavourable situations to their advantage. This is not necessarily a bad thing, for example, in a

context where there are high levels of trust between the officers and members of a public that is policing itself well. In other contexts, however, it is problematic, being likely to result in neglect and abuse, by both police and public. The last part of the paper, therefore, considered how such problems might be tackled or prevented. The nature of the problems needs to be specified as clearly as possible (again, further work is required here), but it is expected that there will be particular emphasis on forms of community development, encouraging communities to become more effectively self-policing, together with radical reform of policing organisations to make them capable of structurally coupling with the emergent forms of public self-policing. Needless to say, perhaps, this is not what happens at the moment.

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