



The police's work with police-citizen partnerships

Field studies from four areas in Sweden

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English summary of Brå report 2018:14

**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) –
centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures**

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This summary is included in the report *The police's work with police-citizen partnerships*, which is available in Swedish at www.bra.se/publikationer.

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This is a summary of the Swedish report
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Summary

In connection with the reorganisation of the Swedish Police to one Police Authority, the decision was made that police would begin to work with so-called police-citizen partnerships (*Sw. medborgarlöften*). These are a development, and an integrated part, of the cooperation process which has served as the basis for the work of the police and municipalities for a number of years. The police-citizen partnership model entails that the police, to a greater extent than was previously the case, engage and involve the perceptions, experiences, and know-how of citizens, staff, and other societal actors, and allow this to be reflected in police activities and in the work of crime prevention and safety creation. The working approach is to result in a document – the police-citizen partnership – that describes the measures which the police and its cooperating parties promise to take in order to address identified local problems.

Brå has followed the police-citizen partnership work in four selected areas and evaluated its performance. The purpose of the evaluation is to furnish the police with a picture of the police-citizen partnership work and provide guidance for future development and improvement of this work. In addition, the aim of the study is to identify whether the work in the studied areas has led to any change of direction in respect of the goals established by the police for the police-citizen partnership: for citizens to experience more participation, to increase confidence in the police, to increase the sense of safety, and to prevent more offences.

The target group for the report is the leadership at the Swedish Police Authority, as well as those individuals who work with police-citizen partnerships and local crime prevention work.

Methods and material

In order to answer the questions posed in the study, the police-citizen partnership process was evaluated and a follow-up was conducted in respect

of the goals of the police-citizen partnerships in the four selected areas. The process evaluation is based on the police's methodology support for the police-citizen partnership work and is based on a series of different data collection methods.

- Interviews with police officers in various positions, with municipal staff and with citizens.
- Participant observations of various elements in the police-citizen partnership work.
- Review of documentation used in the police-citizen partnership work.
- Review of media and social media.
- Questionnaires to citizens who have participated in citizen dialogues, to police officers in the field, and to all municipal police officers in Sweden.

In order to follow-up on the goals with the police-citizen partnerships a citizen survey was conducted in the studied areas both before and after the citizen promises were introduced, in the autumn of 2016 and the autumn of 2017, respectively. The measurement was supplemented by a local questionnaire regarding an individual police-citizen partnership in a public square in one of the studied areas, as well as statistics regarding reported offences in the studied areas.

What does the police-citizen partnership model entail?

The basis of the police-citizen partnership model is research on problem-oriented police work and community policing – local police work in proximity to the citizens. The research has shown that the working approaches – if they are well-implemented – increase the citizens' sense of safety, confidence in the police, and good relations with the police, and also have a moderating effect on criminality and disruptions of public order. Under the police-citizen partnership working approach, the police are to:

- initiate cooperation with the municipality and other local actors, as well as prepare a cooperation agreement;
- conduct dialogues with its staff regarding *what* the problem in the area is and *how* it can be solved;
- conduct dialogues with citizens in the local community;
- produce a local operating picture as well as a common operating picture with the municipality;
- describe and analyse the identified problems;

- plan which activities are to be carried out and formulate a police-citizen partnership;
- carry out the activities promised in the police-citizen partnership;
- follow-up on which work has been done, and on its quality and effects;
- publicise the partnerships and give feedback on the work to the staff and the citizens.

The police-citizen partnership work in the four areas began...

The cooperation with the municipalities in the studied areas got off to a slow start, but subsequently improved. In three of the areas, the police and the municipalities conducted common citizen dialogues, operating pictures, causal analyses, police-citizen partnerships, communication efforts, and follow-ups. In all of the areas, the citizen dialogues had good diversity in respect of gender and age, and were characterised by attentiveness and humility on the part of the police. The police-citizen partnerships included activities which involved the citizens and, when formulating the partnerships, great consideration was given to the citizens' view. In all areas, the police conducted dialogues with their staff regarding the perceived problems in the areas, and the staff were able to contribute with their know-how and experiences. In two of the areas, the municipalities also conducted staff dialogues. On the whole, there was thus compliance with the model and the methodology support.

... but was marred by a number of difficulties

Police-citizen partnership work is new. Accordingly, it is not surprising that a series of implementation problems arose. The primary problems are insufficient information and feedback to citizens and staff. In addition, some parts of the model have been skipped and the work has often been unsystematic and lacked analyses. The implementation problems, broken down by the various elements of the model, are summarised below. Focus is placed on the new elements which the police-citizen partnerships introduce: staff dialogue, citizen dialogue, partnership formulation, operative work with the police-citizen partnerships, and communication.

Staff dialogues within the police

In several areas, no staff dialogues were held regarding *how* the police can work with the identified problems. The dialogues were often simple and, in several cases, lacked documentation, such as operating pictures and results from citizen dialogues. Many discussions lacked discussion regarding the causes of problems, formulation of goals, and ways to follow up on the work. The group leaders, who conducted the dialogues, were insufficiently informed about the purpose and implementation of the dialogue, as a result

of which the staff did not always understand that they had participated in a staff dialogue.

Citizen dialogues with the local community

The form of, and target group for, the citizen dialogues were often selected without a target group analysis or analysis of local conditions, and a relatively small percentage of citizens were reached during the dialogues. It was often the case that the purpose of the dialogues and the way in which they were conducted was not communicated to the participating police officers and municipal representatives who, consequently, did not provide clarity during the dialogues regarding how the citizens could influence the police's work. Instead of being an actual dialogue between the citizens and the police or municipal representative, the nature of the dialogues was more that of one-way communication, constituting an inventory of the citizens' picture of problems.

Formulation of the police-citizen partnerships

As a general rule, the police-citizen partnerships were vague, unspecified, and difficult to measure. They were seldom based on existing cooperation agreements, since such agreements often did not regulate the parameters of cooperation between the police and municipality. Police staff often did not participate in the selection of activities for formulation of the police-citizen partnerships. As a result, the police officers were sometimes compelled to reinterpret the partnerships in order to adapt them to the operative activities.

Operative work with the police-citizen partnerships

The police worked less with the police-citizen partnerships than was planned, and the documentation of the work was minimal. Most of the work with police-citizen partnerships was carried out by the area police. However, they could only work in a single area, on a relatively protected basis, with the police-citizen partnerships and other crime prevention work. The group leaders in the response operations often did not steer the staff towards working with the police-citizen partnerships. In the municipalities, almost all of the police-citizen partnership work was included in the regular operations and would have been performed even without the partnerships.

Feedback and communication to citizens and staff

Other than the police-citizen partnership itself, the staff and citizens seldom received feedback on the results of the staff dialogues and citizen dialogues, respectively. In addition, no significant amount of feedback was given regarding how the police worked with the police-citizen partnership and the effects of the work. The communication focused on the police-citizen partnership itself. Few efforts at communication were made after the police-citizen partnership was signed. Communicators were usually not involved in the work, but when they were, knowledge about the police-citizen partnerships increased the most among citizens. While the area police

officers had sound knowledge about the partnerships, the response police officers had limited knowledge about them and the working approach. The response police officers stated that they did not talk with the citizens about the police-citizen partnerships.

Other work with the police-citizen partnerships

The municipal police officers, who are described as an engine for the police-citizen partnership work, have no responsibility for personnel and have a significant workload. They seldom received assistance from intelligence units or analysis units to produce statistical documentation and conduct analyses, but instead were required to do it alone.

Other implementation problems in the work included, among other things, insufficient documentation and appurtenant follow-up. There was often no written documentation about the police's and municipality's common operating picture, causal analyses, and communication plans.

Experiences of the police-citizen partnership work

The citizens were positive about the police-citizen partnerships

Citizens who participated in the citizen dialogues which Brå observed were positive in terms of the police-citizen partnerships. Many were positively surprised that the police and the municipality took time to listen, and stressed that it was a good initiative. They perceived the police officers as attentive and respectful. The citizens perceived that they gained better knowledge and, to a greater degree, could impact the police's work after dialogues which were characterised by more bilateral communication (for example longer meetings and interviews in building stairwells) than after shorter dialogues in, for example, public places.

Police staff were initially sceptical

Many response police were initially sceptical towards the staff dialogues, which can be associated with insufficient knowledge about, and understanding of, the purpose of the police-citizen partnerships. The police officers thought, for example, that they would need to work with measures to reduce the citizens' sense of unsafety that did not correspond to what they saw as the "actual problems" in the areas. Subsequently, their attitude became more positive to both the staff dialogues and police-citizen partnerships. They were also more positive to the police-citizen partnerships when they were involved in the formulation of the partnerships and when the partnerships fit in to their view of problems. In general, however, the staff wanted more feedback regarding the police-citizen partnership work and its effects.

The police-citizen partnerships were not perceived as being prioritised

According to the staff, the police-citizen partnerships have low status in the local police areas. The response police officers and the area police officers perceived that they did not have sufficient resources to work with the partnerships to the intended extent. Several area police officers believed that the crime prevention work and work with the police-citizen partnerships were not prioritised in the local police area. The municipal police officers, for their part, perceived that the upper management interest in their work had died down since the police-citizen partnerships were to be in place in all municipalities in Sweden. Their perception was that the Police Authority did not request follow-up.

The municipal police officers and municipal representatives thought that the work was complicated

The municipal police officers and municipal representatives found several elements of the police-citizen partnership work to be complicated. They thought, among other things, that the results of the citizen dialogues were difficult to compile, that the causal analysis was difficult and time-consuming, and that it was difficult to follow up on the effects. Anchoring the working approach with, and communication to, the citizens were also perceived as difficult. They were also uncertain as to how they were to include the citizens' perceptions in the operating picture and weigh the citizens' picture against the police's picture of problems in the formulation of the police-citizen partnership. The municipal police officers stated that they felt alone in the police-citizen partnership work and in the implementation of analyses.

The municipal representatives subsequently became more positive

Certain municipal representatives were initially irritated about the police dictating the conditions for the police-citizen partnerships. Several municipal representatives did not understand the purpose of having both police-citizen partnerships and cooperation agreements. On the other hand, they stressed that it was positive that there was now a function within the police with which they could cooperate – the municipal police – and the opinion regarding the commitments subsequently became more positive. However, within the municipal administrations, there was a low level of knowledge regarding the police-citizen partnerships.

Follow-up on the goals of the police-citizen partnerships

At the time of the citizen survey, in the autumn of 2017, the police and the municipalities had only worked with police-citizen partnerships for approximately six months. At the same time, the police-citizen partnerships

have long-term goals. This means that there are relatively limited possibilities of seeing any effects during the studied period, which is also the result of only a small amount of operative work on the partnerships having been carried out and a low level of communication of the work to the citizens. Taken as a whole, this led to doubt among the police officers who participated in the evaluation regarding whether the police-citizen partnership work during the studied period had attained the desired effect.

Participation – knowledge about the partnerships increased somewhat

Knowledge about the police-citizen partnerships among those who responded to the citizen questionnaire increased by six percentage points between the autumn of 2016 and the autumn of 2017. Among women, the percentage who responded that they know what the police are working with and how opinions can be presented also increased. The percentage who perceive that they can influence the police's work was, by and large, unchanged between the two measurement instances. However, the perception of their ability to influence the police's work was greater among those who knew of the police's work with the police-citizen partnerships than those who had not heard of the partnerships. This perception was also common among those who had responded to Brå's survey questionnaire in connection with their participation in a citizen dialogue.

Confidence in the police increased somewhat among women

Confidence in the police increased somewhat between 2016 and 2017. The increase applied, however, only to women. The percentage who perceived that the police are good at handling various problems and who experience that the police share their own values also increased among women. Confidence in the police was higher among those who were aware of the police-citizen partnerships than those who were not. Confidence in the police's method of conducting their work in the public square increased among older persons, according to the local measurements taken on the public square.

The sense of safety was unchanged between the two citizen surveys

The perception of a sense of unsafety and concern about being exposed to crime were largely unchanged between the 2016 and 2017. This applied irrespective of whether or not the individual was aware of the police-citizen partnerships. On the other hand, there were certain differences between the studied areas in respect of concern about being exposed to crime. In one area, the concern about being exposed to crime declined, while the concern in the other areas increased or was unchanged. In the measurement on the public square as well, the concern about being exposed to crime declined. However, the change was only statistically significant among women.

The perception of criminality increased in three areas

The perception of the offences and public order disturbances which were identified in each police-citizen partnership increased or was unchanged between 2016 and 2017 in three of the studied areas. In these areas, there was also an increase in the number of reported offences within most of the studied types of offences. In one area, according to both the citizen questionnaire and the measurement taken on the public square, the perception of certain public order disturbances and offences decreased.

Similar picture in the research and in other comparisons

This evaluation is based on results from the four geographic areas which are included in the study and the result is therefore not representative of how the police-citizen partnership process functions throughout Sweden.

When, however, the results from the process evaluation are compared with the national municipal police survey questionnaire and other experiences of the police-citizen partnership work, similarities emerge, among other things in respect of qualitative shortfalls in compliance with the police-citizen partnership model, difficulties with internal and external communication, and the staff perceptions of a lack of resources.

Many of the identified problems are also reflected in the research. The follow-up on the goals is also consistent with the research, which indicates that the primary effect of the work in proximity to the citizens is on participation and confidence in the police, i.e. the areas where weak positive changes can be distinguished in this evaluation as well.

Brå's assessment

The police-citizen partnerships are a new and a comprehensive working approach, which means that it takes time to implement it and to realise the effects of the work. Brå can observe several advances have been made during the time for evaluation in the four studied areas. As described above, the work has, however, been characterised by a significant number of implementation problems and difficulties, primarily in respect of prioritisation and anchoring. In addition, to date the work has led to minimal changes in the citizens' feeling of participation, confidence in the police, and sense of safety. Moreover, no notable changes in criminality in the four studied areas have been registered.

Recommendations

In order to fully implement the police-citizen partnership model and so that it can lead to the desired effects in the future, the police and the municipalities need to make improvements in a number of areas. In light of this, and based on the results of the four studied areas, Brå has a number of

recommendations for the continued police-citizen partnership work. These proposals are set forth below.

Clarify the prioritisation of the police-citizen partnerships

If the work of the police-citizen partnerships is to continue to be prioritised and made permanent, the police-citizen partnerships should have clear and long-term prioritisations at all levels within the police. In order to achieve this, the work must be even more clearly tied to ordinary operating processes. Protecting the municipal police officers becomes an important aspect. This can be done by, for example, the Authority demonstrating continued interest in their work by requesting continual follow-ups and by the local police areas being encouraged to ensure that the municipal police officers and the area police officers get undivided time to work with the police-citizens partnerships.

Enhance knowledge about, understanding of, the partnerships

Several of the shortcomings in the implementation, as well as the negative attitudes among the police force, could probably be rectified through enhanced knowledge about, and increased understanding of, the purpose of the police-citizen partnerships, as well as ways in which citizen and police views of problems can be combined.

The municipal police officers' knowledge could be enhanced by providing them with further training in analysis and methods and by linking the analysis groups to the municipal police. Staff knowledge and understanding could increase by improving anchoring among the group leaders, so that they can disseminate their knowledge to their groups. In addition, the staff could be involved in the process to a greater extent, particularly in activity planning and partnership formulation. The staff may also need more feedback regarding the result of the work.

In combination with increased use of communicators for the external communication, these efforts could probably, in turn, entail more and improved information to citizens regarding the police-citizen partnerships. The police could also benefit from investing in improving the communication with the municipalities in order to motivate them to work with the partnerships.

Clarify the methodology support in certain respects

The police's methodology support could be clarified on certain points in order to serve as a better support for the implementation of the police-citizen partnerships. Among other things, the difference between the police-citizen partnerships and the cooperation agreements could be clarified, as could the advantages of working in close to citizens. In addition, examples could be provided of how the citizens' perceptions can be combined with the problem-oriented working approach, how the citizens can be involved in the

partnerships, and the way in which the citizen dialogues can be used in the analysis stage of the police-citizen partnership process.

Consider a more adapted ambition level

According to the research, the police-citizen partnership work should have several positive effects. However, the work can claim significant time and resources while, at the same time, the problems and conditions look different in different areas. The police can, therefore, consider whether the ambition level and frequency of the police-citizen partnership work could be varied based on the local conditions and the primary desired effect.

Continue the follow-up and evaluation of the work

The police-citizen partnerships are a new and comprehensive working approach, which takes time to implement. Accordingly, Brå recommends that the police enable continued follow-ups and evaluations of the work in order to ensure that the work achieves the desired effects on a long-term basis. In this context, Brå wishes to underscore the importance of the ability to follow up on the goals of the police-citizen partnerships.