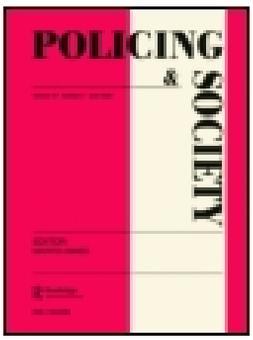

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Blurred boundaries and legal uncertainty in police–volunteer partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Citizen involvement in policing is a means to enhance public confidence in the police and their legitimacy, and to increase their effectiveness. However, governmental control over voluntary policing is fraught with difficulty. We study the relationship between police and citizen volunteers in partnerships, looking specifically at roles and responsibilities in policing and the parties' reflections upon regulation and autonomy in relation to accountability and legal certainty. Our objective is to illuminate how mutual dependencies in police–volunteer partnerships are managed in practice, and the implications thereof. Two types of police–citizen partnerships in Sweden – the Volunteers of the Police and Missing People Sweden – are explored based on interviews with volunteers and Swedish Police Authority representatives. We show that in police–volunteer partnerships characterised by a high degree of integration of tasks and responsibilities as well as a high degree of trust, boundaries become fuzzy and porous. Despite intentions and great efforts to demarcate what volunteers should and should not do, responsibilities of the state police have been delegated to the extent that civilian participation has gone well into the heart of front-line policing. We discuss the consequences of these blurred boundaries in terms of lack of accountability and legal uncertainty.

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Police–citizen partnership; boundaries; legal uncertainty; voluntary policing

Introduction

This article investigates the relationships and interdependencies between police and citizen volunteers in policing. Citizen involvement in policing encompasses 'individuals and organizations involved in policing but in a voluntary capacity' (Button 2002, p. 83). Such policing activities may or may not be state sanctioned or conducted within a public police organisation, and can be performed 'in cooperation with police or purely as a citizen initiative' (Ayling 2007, p. 74). We have investigated two types of police–citizen partnerships in Sweden. The first type is the Volunteers of the Police (VP), with citizens invited to work in a space created and defined for them by the police. The second type – Missing People Sweden (MPS) – is a purely civic initiative occupying a space created by itself. Speaking broadly, citizen participation in policing is nothing particularly new in Sweden. Already in the 1980s, neighbourhood-watch and night-patrol groups were introduced (Hörnqvist 2001). Though, in contrast to those traditional types of voluntary policing, VP and MPS are characterised by a high level of interaction and close collaboration with the police (Uhnoo and Hansen Löfstrand 2018), and were chosen with the objective to illuminate how

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mutual dependencies in police–volunteer partnerships are managed in practice and the implications thereof.

Citizen involvement in policing is often depicted as a means to enhance public confidence in the police and the legitimacy of the police. At the same time, the actions of citizen volunteers may threaten the legitimacy of the police (Fredricksen and Levin 2004). Arguably, if police responsibilities are delegated to citizen volunteers to a great extent, the legal certainty of (voluntary) policing become threatened. To counteract such a development, legal frameworks, police control over volunteer activities and clear boundaries between police and volunteer respective roles and responsibilities are important (Sagar 2004, Ayling 2007). However, as we will show, control over voluntary policing is, in practice, fraught with difficulties. What are the roles and responsibilities of the respective parties? What tasks are delegated to volunteers? How do the respective parties reflect upon regulation and autonomy in relation to accountability and legal certainty? Our purpose is to explore how the relationships between the police and citizen volunteers unfold, and are managed, in practice.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin by accounting for some central ambiguities characterising police-volunteer relations as identified in existing research. We then introduce our empirical cases, VP and MPS. Following a description of our methods, materials and type of analysis, we then outline and discuss our findings in terms of three key analytical themes: resistance and precautions in police-volunteer relations, relative autonomy in the field, and crossing boundaries and legal uncertainty. We show that despite intentions and great efforts to demarcate what volunteers should and should not do, responsibilities of the state police have been delegated to the extent that civilian participation has gone well into the heart of front-line policing.

Ambiguities in police-volunteer relations

The topic of relationships between the police and citizen volunteers has been discussed in theoretical terms (see, e.g. Loader 2000, Button 2002, Taylor 2007, Yarwood 2007, Crawford 2008) and explored empirically (see, e.g. Shapland and Vagg 1988, Crawford 1998, Sagar 2004, Bullock 2017, Uhnoo and Hansen Löfstrand 2018, van Steden and Mehlbaum 2019). We add to the scholarly literature by exploring how relationships between the police and citizen volunteers unfold in practice, specifically shedding light on the management of boundaries, the blurring of boundaries and implications in terms of legal uncertainty.

Broadly speaking, public policing presupposes a relationship between the police and the public, characterised by mutual cooperation, trust, and confidence (Finstad 2000, Loader 2000, Hawdon *et al*. 2003). Citizen involvement in policing is seen as a measure to enhance public confidence in, and the legitimacy of, the police. However, when engaging citizens as a means to enhance the legitimacy of the police, the police faces a dilemma. The police are not a formal employer of citizen volunteers, and do not have the formal authority to govern them. Unavoidably, though, there is a special demand on the police to manage inappropriate behaviour by citizen volunteers, since such behaviour threatens the legitimacy of the police (Fredricksen and Levin 2004). The police must thus find other means by which citizens involved in policing are held responsible for their actions (Millie 2019). A real challenge to the police is overseeing the civilian provision of policing carried out in the field, since 'direct supervision is often difficult, if not impossible' (Fredricksen and Levin 2004, p. 122, see also Sagar 2004).

Indeed, establishing police-volunteers partnerships is a tricky business (Gaston and Alexander 2001). Police relations with volunteers 'have historically been troubled, loaded with hostility and distrust' (Ayling 2007, p. 87). From a police perspective, risks involved in engaging citizen volunteers in policing are, e.g. volunteers destructing evidence, obstructing police work, breaching confidentiality, and resorting to vigilantism (Fredricksen and Levin 2004, Sagar 2004, Ayling 2007, Sharp *et al*. 2008, Uhnoo and Hansen Löfstrand 2018). From a union perspective, introducing citizen volunteers is seen as threatening the job security of police employees (Bullock 2017, Uhnoo and Hansen Löfstrand 2018, van Steden and Mehlbaum 2019). While citizen volunteers are generally positive about their involvement and what they do, they feel under-used and not included in the police subculture, and express a

wish to work *for*, not only with, the police (Millie 2019, p. 11). In addition, citizen volunteers have been noted to express 'confusion about the positions and added value of police volunteers' (van Steden and Mehlbaum 2019, p. 12).

Possible measures to develop constructive police-volunteer partnerships are, e.g. developing a comprehensive legal framework, demarcating lines of accountability, defining roles and responsibilities (Sagar 2004, van Steden and Mehlbaum 2019), i.e. defining the nature and limits of voluntary labour (Ayling 2007, pp. 90–92). Such measures should be taken so as to prevent any extensive off-loading of state responsibilities onto citizens (Sagar 2004). Excessive delegation of police responsibilities onto citizens may lead to a residualisation of policing by the police (Crawford 2006, p. 116), i.e. 'a situation in which the public police become a last resort for policing the really bad risks' (Ayling 2007, p. 92). Arguably, though, also a modest delegation of police responsibilities, in combination with a high level of interaction and close collaboration in police-citizen partnerships, may blur the boundaries and threaten the legal certainty of policing.

Our Swedish cases of voluntary policing

In contrast to the UK, where the use of volunteers is partly the outcome of government actions to compensate for cuts in public spending on the police (Nichols *et al*. 2014, Bullock 2017), Sweden has embraced voluntary policing initiatives during a time of increased public funding of the police force (Lindström 2015). Despite these differences, both countries have a police-in-crisis discourse, and police authorities acknowledge that their resources, capacities, and capabilities are finite (Crawford 2008, Persson 2014, Rogers 2017). Furthermore, in both countries, there has been emphasis on the need for citizen involvement in policing (Swedish Ministry of Justice 1996, Hörnqvist 2001, Bullock 2017) and for policing 'to be responsive and accountable to local communities' (Newburn 2008, p. 828, Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2016).

VP was initiated in 2005 in Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden, with the explicit purpose of linking the police and local communities. Today VP operates in all police regions in the country. The Swedish Police Authority, led by the National Police Commissioner, comprises of 7 police regions (and 30 police districts). There is no compiled, and official, record of the number of police volunteers in the country. However, according to our approximate compilation, based on reports by regional police volunteer co-ordinators employed by the police authority, there are about 3000 trained police volunteers in the three metropolitan police regions in the country. In the rest of the country, there are about 800 trained police volunteers. There are no figures available on how many of the trained volunteers are active, with the exception of the police region of the capital city, where approximately 400 volunteers are active, i.e. regularly providing their services. The volunteers are to complement and enhance the local police's crime prevention work, by acting as extra eyes and ears. They do not wear regular uniforms (but fluorescent vests), are unpaid, and have no legal powers other than those of the ordinary citizen.

MPS is a volunteer search-and-rescue group arranging search parties to save lives, help families find their missing relatives, and gather evidence of crimes. MPS also publicises missing person cases in the hope of receiving helpful information from the public. The organisation has grown rapidly since it began in 2012. Today it has a national management board, and 24 local branches, more than 200 volunteers who organise and lead search operations, around 2,000 members, and more than 60,000 citizens registered as interested in participating in search-and-rescue operations. MPS is involved in approximately 600 missing person cases throughout Sweden every year (of the altogether 7000 disappearances reported to the police every year in the country), with each missing person case involving an average of 75–100 volunteers (however the all-time high of number of volunteers involved in a missing person case is 3000 volunteers).

We regard both VP and MPS volunteers as involved in policing, and define policing as 'intentional action involving the conscious exercise of power or authority (by an individual or organization) that is directed towards rule enforcement, the promotion of order or assurances of safety' (Crawford *et al*. 2005, p. 4). This definition covers both 'visible patrol, crime prevention and reassurance activities',

and 'crime detection and investigation' (Crawford *et al*. 2005, p. 4). A great advantage of this definition, for our purposes, is that it is *not* based on any *a priori* assumptions about the roles of the different policing providers or the relationships between the police and citizen volunteers, which is what we have set out to explore in this article. VP and MPS were chosen with the objective to illuminate how mutual dependencies in police–volunteer partnerships are managed in practice and the implications thereof.

Data and analysis

The findings presented are based on 17 interviews with a total of 31 individuals. We employed purposive sampling strategies (Marshall and Rossman 2016): In connection to the VP case, we have interviewed present and former police volunteer co-ordinators employed by the Swedish Police Authority, as well as VP volunteers. In the MPS case, we interviewed police officers handling cases of missing persons, and MPS volunteers in leadership positions. To construct a diverse sample, we interviewed police authority employees and volunteers in Sweden's three major cities, and in four smaller towns. Further characteristics of our sample are presented in the table below Table 1.

In terms of police authority employees, we aimed at conducting individual interviews. Exceptions from this rule were made on two occasions, when the police authority employees themselves suggested bringing a close colleague with similar responsibilities to join the interview. When interviewing volunteers in policing, we employed two different interview methods: focus groups and individual interviews. In terms of VP volunteers, we strategically chose to interview pre-existing groups (Kitzinger 1994): four teams of volunteers who knew each other after having worked as volunteers together for a relatively long time. Using focus group interviews, entailing interaction between participants, produced rich empirical materials on collectively shared experiences of actual incidents (Kitzinger 1994, p. 105).

In the case of MPS, an autonomous citizen initiative, where anyone can spontaneously join in its searches for missing people, there are no pre-existing groups of volunteers forming teams suitable for focus group interviewing. Furthermore, when it comes to MPS, no police authority employees are assigned the task of co-ordinating volunteers. Instead, volunteers in leadership positions oversee and manage volunteer work. Individual interviews were conducted with such volunteers in leadership positions from four different local branches, with the exception of two volunteers in leadership positions who wished to be interviewed together. In addition, a member of the national management board was interviewed. All MPS-volunteers in leadership positions have regular and sometimes close contacts with the police, as well as own experiences of carrying out volunteer work.

The altogether 17 interviews lasted between an hour and two and a half hours each. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of our study, and about the fact that participation in our study were voluntary. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In order to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees, all information that identified the participants was removed from the transcripts. Topics covered in the interviews with police authority employees were voluntary policing in general, voluntary policing by VP and MPS, and views on the relationship between the police and the volunteers, including benefits, challenges, and risks involved. Volunteers were interviewed about

Table 1. The sample of empirical materials.

	VP		MPS	
Swedish cases of voluntary policing	Individual interviews	Group interviews	Individual interviews	Group interviews
Police authority employees	6	1 group (2 individuals)	1	1 group (2 individuals)
Volunteers in policing	0	4 groups (15 individuals)	3	1 group (2 individuals)

their respective volunteer activities and experiences, and their views on their relationships with the police, including possible differences in opinion in collaborative work.

The interviews were analysed for key themes: first, the implementation of VP and MPS programmes, including cautionary tales about 'risky volunteers' likely to create problems, police accounts of precautions taken, and symbolic boundaries between the police and volunteer work; second, experiences of regulation and autonomy while in the field, i.e. while doing 'operative' work; and third, accounts of blurred boundaries and legal uncertainty. Below, we present our findings in connection to these themes.

Findings

The findings section contains three major sub-sections. In the first sub-section about resistance to the introduction of voluntary policing, we show how the introduction of VP and MPS unfolded. Due to key differences related to their respective introduction phase, VP and MPS are discussed separately in the first sub-section. In the second sub-section about the relative autonomy of volunteers in policing, and the third sub-section dealing with instances of boundary crossing and legal uncertainty, our findings are instead discussed thematically, because of a focus on similarities in police-volunteer relations (regardless of type of voluntary policing initiatives) when citizen volunteers are depicted by the police as a desirable resource.

'It's not in our culture': resistance and precautions in police–volunteer relations

The level of citizen participation in voluntary (non-professional and unpaid) activities is as high in Sweden as in any other comparable country (e.g. the UK or the Netherlands). However, in contrast to countries such as the UK, the voluntary sector in Sweden is only involved in 'the core areas of the welfare state' to a very limited extent (Lundström and Svedberg 2003, p. 221). Furthermore, very few Swedes are 'in favour of voluntary organisations taking over service provision in core areas of the welfare state' (Lundström and Svedberg 2003, p. 223). There is thus a limited tradition among state authorities of co-operation with civil organisations in the provision of welfare services. In addition, the police authority is a particularly hierarchical public institution, resulting in a lack of transparency of its actions, and its operations and internal affairs being closed to public view. Furthermore, the police culture fosters a strong in-group solidarity, dividing 'us' (the police) and 'them' (the public), and there is scepticism towards and distrust of the public (Waddington 1999). A volunteer co-ordinator employed by the police[1] complained that 'it's not in our culture in Sweden, among state authorities, and absolutely not in the police authority' to make use of volunteers. Taken together, these factors resulted in explicit unease in relation to the idea of volunteers inside the Swedish police.

> Volunteer coordinator: There's quite a large gap between 'we the police' and 'you the public'. And, then, for the police to accept volunteers into the police organisation when they don't have a tradition of working together with civil society really […] so, of course, it takes a really long time for volunteers to be accepted.

Thus, the police authority had little experience of using volunteers before the introduction of VP in 2005. Furthermore, according to volunteer co-ordinators interviewed, the police have cultivated a self-image of being the public's 'sole saviour'. In spite of this resistance to the very idea of co-operating with civil society, the Swedish police ultimately initiated and established partnerships with the volunteer groups in this study.

Not if, but when – top-down introduction

The VP programme was implemented in the police organisation from the top down, by the Stockholm County Police Chief at the time, despite internal doubts and resistance.

> Volunteer coordinator: She came home from Canada […] and told her staff that she thought this was great and 'when can we have this on the streets in Stockholm?' And then they said, 'there is doubt whether we can have it' […]. Then she said, 'I did not ask if, I asked when.'

The volunteer co-ordinator pointed out two reasons for the resistance to volunteers. First, the fundamental binary opposition between the police and the public, and second, doubts about the ability of volunteers as private citizens (without any authority or power beyond that of the ordinary citizen) to help the police.

> The police authority is an old state institution, and many senior police officers think that either you are a police officer or you are a civilian, and they could not see […] how private individuals could help the police, because they could not perform police duties.

In our interviews, two distinct cautionary tales concerning 'the risky volunteer' recur. One tale is of volunteers who are 'wannabe police', overly interested in the police and all kinds of police paraphernalia (weapons, uniforms, vehicles, and gadgets), wanting to hang around the officers and wear similar dress and equipment, and having evident difficulty understanding the boundaries between what they could and could not do – 'wanting a little bit too much', as police representative interviewees expressed it.

> Some are overly interested in the police. […] They don't really know where to draw the line. […] It's people who […] gladly show up in black pants with a lot of pockets, a little police-like, wearing black gloves. […] One of the volunteers brought pepper spray and another one was wearing body armour, and argued 'it's dangerous out there'.

The police, then, fear that such volunteers may provoke trouble and violent situations, rather than help the police to increase public safety. The second cautionary tale depicts volunteers as pre-school children in need of (adult) supervision and guidance from a police officer, protecting them from risks and harm that they may not even realise themselves. As a volunteer expressed it: 'They see us as a burden, as pre-school children, and such a stigma is not fun'. In the end, both types of cautionary tale depict volunteers not as a resource to depend upon, but as a burden that cannot be used in situations or in places where the police could actually use additional staff, such as high-risk soccer games, unsafe areas of the city centre, or in interactions with hostile public groups.

To implement the VP programme, in line with management decrees, but in spite of the concerns of the police authority's security department, a host of precautions were taken to separate volunteers from the internal life of the police organisation and to appease internal critics. For example, a recruitment and screening process was developed that involved interviews with potential volunteers, requests for extracts from criminal records and from suspected offender records, and a three-part education course, including the signing of a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement. Notably, even after formally accepting citizens as police volunteers, police–volunteer relations were characterised by symbolic boundaries. One concerned access to police buildings or premises, which was controlled by marking restricted areas inside police premises with the police line tape commonly used at crime scenes, which obviously signalled police distrust of volunteers.

> Volunteer coordinator: How much access should they have to the station? […] If we choose to use these citizens and they have passed aptitude assessments and education, then we do not need to treat them as children. They are adults. So, I'm absolutely sure they did not need this marked boundary […] at the police station […] delimited by police line tape.

A second boundary revolved around access to internal briefings among police colleagues, including access to confidential information, backstage police rooms, and police jargon. Some police officers do not want volunteers around, because they need a space of their own for their 'collegial jargon', as a volunteer coordinator explained. A third boundary symbolising (a lack of) integration and trust concerned the volunteers' access to the police radio communication system (RAKEL). There has been resistance on the part of the police to introducing volunteers to RAKEL, but in one of the largest cities, where there is a high degree of mutual trust and integration of police and

volunteer work, the police volunteers have gained access to it. The volunteer version enables any police officer to overhear volunteers, but it does *not* enable the volunteers to overhear police officers' talk.

If you can't beat them, make them useful

In contrast to VP, MPS originated as a purely self-organised and autonomous citizen initiative, with police–volunteer relations initiated by the MPS volunteers themselves. In 2012, private individuals formed MPS, hoping to operate nationwide. At the time, there were news media reports about a missing woman, 'Marina', and because the leaders knew that publicity attracts sponsors, MPS decided to initiate search operations. Their findings led to a major breakthrough in the police investigation and their successes led the news media to depict the country's police as incompetent, and MPS as superior to them (Uhnoo and Hansen Löfstrand 2018).

> MPS volunteer: To some extent, this massive media pressure on the police has changed our position. The police did not want another Marina case. […] For reasons of self-preservation, the police began to accept that Missing People can join in and act on disappearances.

The new-found fame of MPS pressured the police to enter into more formal collaboration. As a police chief interviewee responsible for handling missing people cases expressed it, 'If you can't beat them, make them useful', and:

> At first, we just thought they were a pain in the ass. 'Don't interfere in our work' […]. But then a few years ago […] we decided that […] we have to absorb them instead and use them.

In relation to MPS, three cautionary tales of 'the risky volunteer' recur. One is the tale of desperate-to-help volunteers. Rather than helping the police, they were seen as a burden, because the sheer number of volunteers showing up to participate in search operations may be overwhelming, and owing to a lack of education, training, and experience, the desperate-to-help volunteers may obstruct important police work. It was considered difficult to steer their operations and make them stick to their actual task. The second cautionary tale depicts volunteers as culprits, infiltrating search parties, and thus obviously in it for all the wrong reasons. Because anyone can join search parties, both MPS and the police lack control over who joins search operations. On several occasions in the history of MPS, perpetrators have joined search parties, only later to be found guilty of causing the death of the missing person. Leaders of MPS provide a third cautionary tale, that of 'police hunters', 'who love to hang around police officers', as a manager of a regional MPS organisation reported. The 'police hunter' volunteers are seen as dubious, being more interested in establishing contacts with police management than in helping the relatives of missing persons. The tale of the 'police hunter' is similar to the VP tale of the 'wannabe police'. In both cases, being seen as overly interested in the police sounds a warning bell for volunteer managers.

To overcome scepticism and resistance to inviting citizen volunteers to participate in search operations, and to manage the perceived risks, a number of precautions were taken by the police and by MPS management.

> MPS volunteer: A bunch of maniacs who all of a sudden go out in the forest looking for dead people. Clearly, you need to be a little sceptical of this. So, we have had to prove that we are serious over a number of years.

Two main precautions were taken by the police. The first was to establish an agreement with MPS that it should always contact and receive approval from the police before initiating a search party. The police thus control when and where MPS carries out search operations. MPS should also report any information gained during search operations to the police. The second precaution was that the police began educating management-level volunteers about systematic search methods and the importance of confidentiality. In parallel, the management board of MPS began requiring its management-level staff to undergo a criminal background check and to sign a non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement. It also required all volunteers joining search parties to identify themselves.

The precautions were taken in the hope of increasing the police's trust in MPS and to show its willingness to co-operate closely.

For MPS, we have identified three main sets of boundaries symbolising (a lack of) integration and trust between the volunteers and the police. The first concerns degrees of access to police premises in a symbolic sense: whether MPS volunteers are allowed to enter the building, join in meetings of police officers concerning missing people cases, or even sit in on ongoing police interrogations. The second concerns access to information pertaining to ongoing criminal investigations and knowledge about people reported missing. The third concerns access to the field of operative police work in cases of missing persons: whether they are allowed to work side by side with police officers during high-priority searches or only to organise citizen initiatives in cases when the police are no longer organising active search operations.

Despite key differences related to the introduction phase of VP and MPS, we note two main similarities between our cases. The first concerns the police drawing boundaries symbolising police (lack of) trust in volunteers. These will determine volunteers' access to the inner life of police premises, organisations, and operations. The second concerns the overall ambivalent image of 'the citizen volunteer' among the police: on the one hand, they are portrayed as innocent and naïve 'ordinary' citizens interfering with (and taking resources from) real and important police work, while on the other hand they are seen as calculating and/or cunning. However, as we shall show, there are also citizen volunteers who are not seen as a burden but are depicted as constituting a desirable resource for the police. Below, we focus on the relationship between such volunteers and the police.

Relative autonomy in the field

Volunteer activities in the field are regulated by the police. In the case of VP, the volunteers are provided with the exact timeframe and the place where they are to be present or to patrol, as well as yellow vests and first aid kits. They are assigned a specific police officer on duty as their contact. Moreover, they are informed about the overall purpose of their activities in the field, e.g. to 'be visible', and thereby 'increase public safety', but also at times by their very presence, cheerful approach, and 'use of their eyes and ears', to interrupt aggressive and potentially violent situations and prevent crime. Furthermore, volunteers are asked by the police to report what they observe in the field. On the whole, volunteers appreciate close collaboration with the police while in the field, but only rarely work under direct police supervision.

In the case of MPS, it is up to the police to decide the particular missing person cases in which MPS may conduct searches. The police generally do not want MPS to work on criminal cases or those that the police see as 'voluntary disappearances'. MPS representatives know their work depends on good relations with the police: 'we would never be able to do this if the police did not support us'. Thus, they await police approval before initiating a search and are generally perceptive about the wishes of the police. In most cases of missing people, the police do not regulate where volunteers search, or for how long, and cannot control who (or how many people) participate in search parties. However, in high-priority searches, the MPS volunteers are sometimes allowed to carry out joint searches with the police. At such times they work under the auspices of the police and the police decide which areas will be searched by the MPS. 'Then the police decide everything', reported an MPS representative. Regardless, the police never decide *how* the MPS volunteers are to carry out their searches. According to one police officer, a kind of 'regulated freedom' (Rose and Miller 2010, p. 272) is most efficient in keeping relations and active co-operation functioning smoothly:

> The most important thing is the leadership approach, really. Let them work independently; they like that. Provide the prerequisites for working within a given frame, 'Do whatever you want, as long as you search this area', we show them that we trust them to search, instead of saying 'we do not want you to be here'.

However, the police officers interviewed repeatedly emphasised that they could never rely on volunteer searches. Because volunteers are civilians, the police do not trust their competence.

Personal trust and subtle regulation

As in the case of VP, MPS volunteers interpret close contact as a sign of trust in them and their work and appreciation of them as a real resource. Notably, in both cases, with personal trust comes the integration of police and volunteer activities in the field. To build trusting relations, the VP volunteers depend on allies among the police, with whom they build rapport through regular interactions. In the case of MPS, trusting relations are built rather by representatives of MPS's local management actively building relationships with police station officers: 'All these phone calls build a relationship, because the more times we talk to the station commander, eventually they know who I am, or I know who they are'. With trusting relationships, information can be shared both ways, according to an MPS local management representative:

> After a week or so, the necessary relationships with the police had been built. The police needed to know where we were searching, and we wanted to know where they wanted us to search, and then we received a number of tips.

Trusting relations even enable access to internal meetings in the police station and access to classified information about the suspect.

> MPS volunteer: Eventually, we were invited to a meeting at the police station with the legendary chief of the serious crimes unit. […] Then we had a review where they were quite open and told us what they knew about the behaviour of suspected offenders.

As pointed out by Sagar (2004, p. 106), volunteers commonly expect to 'develop friendly relations with the local officers', and the information sharing that such relations entail brings a 'sense of being valued'; to the volunteers it 'signals an appreciation' and 'relationships based on trust'. In our study, both police and volunteers perceive such good relations to be a necessary condition for an effective partnership. However, having established such a relationship with the volunteers, the police find themselves in a difficult situation. The police do not have the formal authority to govern volunteer activities in detail, because the police are not (and do not want to be) their employer. However, an effective partnership requires regulation of volunteer activities. To manage this dilemma, the police tend to govern volunteer operations in a subtle way, which in turn requires a high degree of perceptiveness on the part of the volunteers. Below, an MPS volunteer describes the tacit agreement on subtle regulation:

> We began to search […] and felt that 'something is wrong here' […]. So, we asked the police, 'what do you think?' […] 'well you can still search but stay away from the family at this point', which is very odd. […] That's a typical example of them steering us, but very delicately. It wasn't the case that they said, 'you shall not'. […] Informally, they confirmed that they understood our suspicions. The worst thing we can do is to step in and ruin a police investigation […]. Therefore we are very perceptive of what the police say. If they say 'not in that direction', we refrain. They don't have to explain.

With trusting relations and an integration of police and volunteer work, volunteers become a real resource for the police. The point is that with trust in each other and an integration of work tasks come both a relative autonomy as to *how* tasks are performed and an increasing delegation of responsibilities, to the extent that the volunteers involved are in fact 'conducting roles that go well to the heart of what is conventionally understood as "front line" policing' (Bullock 2017, p. 345), although this was never the original intention.

The discretionary nature of voluntary policing

Furthermore, volunteers at times find themselves in difficult situations demanding quick decision-making, which further blurs the boundaries. Volunteers actively reflect on what they should and should not do in the capacity of police volunteers, e.g. when stumbling across narcotics.

> VP: Regardless of whether we would have picked it [the narcotics] up and put it in the bag and waited for the police, or if we would have just stood there while awaiting the police, we would have acted correctly in legal terms. But it's a matter of assessment and it is difficult.

VP: We were unsure, is it criminal to pick it up or not? [laughter] […].

VP: You do something for society and then you get arrested for possession of narcotics – that wouldn't be fun.

Just like the work of police officers (Fredricksen and Levin 2004, p. 127), being a police volunteer entails working without direct supervision and with a high degree of discretion in terms of decision-making in complex situations. Unlike the police, the volunteers lack police training and experience, and thus find complex situations particularly difficult to manage. As illustrated above, police volunteers express uncertainty in such situations – should they act in the capacity of an ordinary citizen, or do they have certain powers and obligations as representatives of the police? Moreover, MPS volunteers describe having suddenly found themselves in difficult situations. A representative of the MPS management recalls a crime-related missing person case, memorable because it involved crossing the line between police and volunteer work and exceeding the (non-existent) authority of a citizen volunteer in policing. As a result of a lack of knowledge and awareness, decisions were made to proceed with investigations into the case, which in turn plunged the volunteers into a potentially dangerous situation:

> We realised quickly that it involved prostitution, narcotics, assault, and even a murder. […] We crossed the line, because all of a sudden, we started talking to the relatives and started searching in wider circles. […] I'm not defending our actions, but we wanted to find the person. It happened out of ignorance I think. We began talking to her addict friends, and then, all of a sudden, one of the police investigators said 'you realise that you are moving around in dangerous terrain, don't you?' We realised that we were crossing the boundary.

The examples discussed below illustrate the discretionary nature of the work that policing involves, regardless the type of policing provider. With autonomous decision-making by volunteers, boundaries between the public police and volunteers become blurred.

Crossing boundaries and legal uncertainty

With blurred boundaries in police–volunteer partnerships, the accountability and legal certainty of the work of the volunteers becomes a problem. Both VP and MPS volunteers wear vests, setting them apart from the ordinary citizen and perhaps signalling their membership of the policing family. However, as pointed out by Bullock (2017, p. 347), 'citizens are not always able to distinguish between the actors in the extended police family, and express confusion regarding the various roles and the powers available to them'. When the authority, powers, responsibilities, and roles of volunteers in policing are uncertain, the public are left to assume that they do have such powers. It is also unclear to the public what they can legitimately expect from the volunteers (Crawford 2008).

It is the task of the Swedish Police Authority to increase public safety, and more recently, to 'come closer to' ordinary citizens and local communities (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2016). Police volunteers have become a tool for the police to make the Swedish Police Authority 'more visible' in local communities, as a police volunteer explained:

> The police aren't foot patrolling as much as they used to. They are not visible outdoors, on foot. But we are out there walking and we represent the police. We have 'Volunteers of the Police' written on our vests […] so indirectly the police become more visible. […] That's what the public wants, police officers patrolling on foot, visible police officers.

Thus, the volunteers interviewed view themselves as representatives of the police authority, and see their work as making *the police* visible in local communities. However, in another interview with police volunteers, this fact was problematised. They reported that citizens encountered in public places do not understand their role and authority as 'police volunteers':

> VP: It happens that people do not understand our role. 'What is a police volunteer? Are you the police or shall you become police officers?' […] They ask about authority and power as well. 'Can you arrest people?' Because we also have police radios, they think […].
>
> VP: They think we can put people in jail.

Evidently, to the ordinary citizen the powers and authority of the police volunteers are unclear, thus indicating problems of legal uncertainty.

Intervening – in what capacity?

The volunteers' vests symbolise a difference between the volunteers and ordinary citizens and align the volunteers with the police. With the assumption among the public that volunteers have police-like powers comes an expectation that the volunteers will intervene in situations such as fights:

> PV: When there's a fight, some people see us and want us to intervene, and there can be a lot of commotion.
>
> PV: We have had people standing behind us telling us 'but, Goddammit, do something!' […].
>
> PV: Some people question why we butt in, while others say 'why don't you do anything?'

In threatening situations, volunteers are directed to take off their vests, i.e. to transform back into 'ordinary citizens'. However, a police volunteer describes another reason for taking off the vest: to carry out covert policing.

> Once I took my vest off, because we were to check on a specific person […]. I was able to pass [him] and keep an eye on what was happening until the police patrol arrived. […] We were asked to observe how the situation developed and what was happening.

In this example, the volunteer was acting in the name of the police and the activity could be likened to police reconnaissance work. Even if volunteers in the above example never arrested the person, like any other citizen they had the power to make so-called 'citizen arrests' (when they witness a crime being committed that can result in a prison sentence of six months or more). In the following excerpt, police volunteers discuss whether to make citizen arrests in the capacity of a 'police volunteer'. They note that making such arrests while wearing the police volunteer vest would likely be 'sending a mixed message' to the public:

> We tell the public, 'we are not police officers; we have no police powers'. We may actually make citizen arrests, but if we detain John until the police shows up, we would be sending mixed messages. […] So, if you're making a citizen arrest, don't wear your vest.

Hence, for the authority for detainment and arrest to be transparent to ordinary citizens, citizen arrests should not be made with the police vest on (because the intervention could only be justified if performed in the capacity of an ordinary citizen). In stark contrast to this logic, other groups of volunteers interviewed point out the importance of intervening when wearing the police volunteer vest, because *not* intervening would contribute to a loss of confidence in the police among the public.

> Let's say there's a situation where lives and property are in danger. If a person sees that 'there's someone wearing a police volunteer vest and he isn't doing anything', it may result in a huge loss in confidence in the police.

Renaming police-like volunteer activities – crossing the line

As shown above, a high degree of integration of police and police volunteer tasks and responsibilities results in boundaries between policing actors becoming fuzzy and porous (Ayling 2007, p. 92), and legal certainty becomes a problem. As in many other national contexts (Sagar 2004, Ayling 2007, p. 87), the Police Union in Sweden was highly critical of the idea of police volunteers, fearing it would result in fewer police being employed and 'a residualisation of policing by the police' (Crawford 2006, p. 112). The solution was an agreement that police volunteers were 'not allowed to exercise public authority'. However, in stark contrast to this seemingly clear-cut judicial boundary, depictions of practices in our empirical materials show the boundary is fuzzy and blurred:

> Volunteer coordinator: Initially the police union was very sceptical. It was about the exercise of public authority and where to draw the line, about authority and power, but we could refute such concerns quickly. […] The

> boundary of the exercise of public authority is absolute. It's not difficult. It is not the boundary itself that is difficult – it's the grey zone close to it that is difficult, well, how close to the boundary one may go.

Furthermore, while frequently depicted as clear-cut, but in fact fuzzy and blurred, the judicial boundary is actively and strategically circumvented, as evident in another volunteer co-ordinator's account:

> The judicial boundary is that volunteers may not engage in the exercise of public authority. For example, volunteers may not perform foot patrols – we take public safety walks.

Police tasks like 'patrolling on foot', commonly seen as being at the heart of the exercise of public police authority and hence not an official work task for volunteers, are renamed for volunteers so that they can continue performing them. Patrolling on foot is referred to as a 'walk to increase public safety' or a 'public safety walk'.

In interviews with MPS representatives, the importance of never blurring boundaries was voiced, in terms of never 'stepping ahead of' the police so as not to damage the relationship of trust.

> We safeguard our relationship to the police carefully because we are close to them. They shall never find us trying to step ahead of them […]. There's a risk of losing our humility, because we are mates with the police.

Notwithstanding this assurance, it is clear that some of the actual activities of MPS volunteers are strikingly similar to those of the police. MPS management has actively and for strategic purposes renamed its activities to perform 'police work' in direct contravention of judicial boundaries. Talking to relatives and acquaintances to investigate the whereabouts of the missing person is not referred to as 'interrogating', but instead as 'interviewing' people. Reconnaissance work is referred to as 'information gathering'.

> The police work a bit like us. What we call information gathering, they refer to as reconnaissance. […] We are inspired by them.

As described by a representative of MPS management in one major city, the organisation commonly works more on 'interviewing' and 'information gathering' than on initiating search parties because it is difficult to conduct search operations in a city environment.

> Today we do a lot more information gathering. […] It may easily be mistaken for police work, but we have chosen a different terminology, so that we don't think that we are fake police. When we do interviews, they do interrogations. […] However, our work is not very different. […] Today we do a lot of interviewing […] which means that our work is similar to the work of the police. So today we co-operate very well.

This new and police-like way of performing volunteer work has been criticised within the MPS organisation.

> MPS volunteer: There are those groups within MPS who say 'wait, we shouldn't be playing police'. But we need to adjust our work and, unfortunately, this makes our work in urban areas more police-like. There's absolutely no conflict about this. The police officers that we talk to say, 'it's great if you help us to do our work, we wish that the police had the resources necessary to do this work as well, but that's not the case today'.

Unlike police officers, MPS volunteers lack formal powers, meaning that they – more than the police – rely on establishing trusting relationships with the public to encourage them to talk freely and provide the volunteers with useful information about the missing person. Paradoxically, both police representatives and volunteers assume that the public finds it easier to talk to volunteers than to the police.

> MPS volunteer: As Missing People volunteers we are seen as more equal to the public, meaning that the public talk more with us and give us better leads than what they would give the police. Because the police officer has a formal role, and his uniform [laughter]. One feels more exposed, I think, when passing on information to the police.

When talking to relatives of the missing person, MPS volunteers establish a type of trusting relationship that depends on the two parties being 'equal', while in fact, the volunteers obviously

align themselves with the police. This trusting relationship in turn enables them to gain more valuable information from the relatives than the police – information that is always handed over to the police, even when volunteers are explicitly asked by relatives not to do so.

> MPS volunteer: We never keep any information to ourselves, even though the public says, 'You cannot pass on this information'. We tell [short laughing] it to the police, because we are not the police. It's not us who are going to put the jigsaw puzzle together, it's the police.

Hence, from the perspective of the ordinary citizen (in this case the relatives of the missing person) the roles and responsibilities of volunteers involved in policing become unclear and uncertain, with legal uncertainty becoming an issue. In this example – and the earlier mentioned example of covert policing done by police volunteers – we have seen how volunteers claim the role of an 'ordinary citizen' for strategic and covert reasons to provide the police with useful information. At times, the police accept the volunteers' gifts of useful information as part of an ongoing investigation. Drawing on Ayling (2007, p. 90), it could be argued that to maintain legal certainty it is sometimes necessary for the police 'to refuse to use information gathered … however tempting it is to "nail" an offender'.

Our next example illustrates how a lack of accountability and legal uncertainty can become a problem, owing to ignorance. A representative of MPS management described a situation when the volunteers 'all of a sudden realised we were in too deep' and were nervous that the police would blame them for having exceeded their non-existent powers:

> We were very nervous that the police would be very angry and think 'okay … we now have civilians doing reconnaissance'. And three, four, five times we were humble and said that 'we know we have gone too far, we apologise.' We also realised very quickly that we had to get a contact in serious crimes or somewhere within the police […] so that we, when we feel that there is something fishy in this, have someone to turn to. We've got that contact now, so now, when we make a phone call to serious crimes, they listen to us.

We have shown that the judicial boundary according to which citizen volunteers may never attend to matters involving the exercise of public police authority is not clear cut and self-evident, and that it is in practice often crossed. The work of volunteers in policing becomes more and more police-like. This development seems to be supported by some police officers, noting the usefulness of volunteers and suggesting additional training in police work methods for volunteers.

Concluding discussion

Although both VP and MPS engage in policing, they represent two different types of citizen involvement in policing. In the first case, citizens are invited to work in a space created for them by the police while, in the second case, citizens are occupying a space created by the voluntary organisation itself. Also the type of policing activities carried out differ, with police volunteers typically engaging in 'visible patrol, crime prevention and reassurance activities', and MPS volunteers involved in 'crime detection and investigation' (Crawford *et al.* 2005, p. 4). However, despite these differences, VP and MPS share similarities concerning, e.g. how police-volunteer relations deepen over time, resulting in an integration of tasks and responsibilities, and a blurring of boundaries. Furthermore, in both cases, the level of civilian participation in policing have become greater than originally intended and ever anticipated, resulting in problems of accountability and legal certainty.

We have shown that the Swedish police have accepted voluntary labour, albeit reluctantly, and entered into police–volunteer partnerships. Because volunteers are 'ordinary citizens', and as such have no (formal) powers beyond those of any other 'ordinary citizen', there are no formal accountability frameworks in relation to unpaid citizen volunteers. However, when entering into partnerships, and especially if these are to be effective, the police must find *other* means by which the citizen volunteers involved are held responsible for their own activities. The means to hold volunteers accountable involve processes of recruitment, screening, and training. Furthermore, symbolic boundaries are limiting the volunteers' access to police premises, internal meetings of police colleagues, and

confidential information. In addition, the police stipulate the conditions for participation in field policing. Just as in police work (Fredricksen and Levin 2004), the operative volunteer work is highly discretionary in nature and lack direct supervision. The very nature of operative policing work, whether by a police officer or a citizen volunteer, enables only indirect and imperfect police control over the activities of citizens participating in policing. To ensure legal certainty, volunteers are 'not allowed to exercise public authority' and thus should not do any task seen to be the exclusive preserve of the public police.

The lack of supervision amplifies the volunteers' relative autonomy in decision-making. While in the field, quick decision-making exacerbate the risk of blurring boundaries. As reported in existing research, it is important to define the roles of the public police and the citizen volunteers, and the limit of volunteer labour (Ayling 2007), to ensure that 'the real level of civilian participation is not greater than anticipated' (Sagar 2004, p. 110). However, as we have shown, despite good intentions and great efforts to demarcate what volunteers should and should not do, the responsibilities of the state police have unavoidably been delegated to citizen volunteers. Civilian participation has gone well into the heart of front-line policing, although this was never the intention.

In police–volunteer partnerships characterised by a high degree of integration of tasks and responsibilities, and a high degree of mutual trust, boundaries become fuzzy and porous (Ayling 2007). Since the police lack the formal authority to govern the volunteer activities in detail, they tend to govern volunteer operations in subtle ways, which requires a high degree of perceptiveness on the part of the volunteers. Arguably, such tacit agreements about subtle regulation are a silent approval for citizen volunteers to perform tasks that are commonly regarded as the exclusive preserve of the public police. Neither police nor volunteers would wish to acknowledge this agreement openly, since both parties are aware of the legal uncertainty this brings from the perspective of the 'ordinary citizen'. The more successful the volunteer schemes become, the more the volunteers become 'victims of their own success' – in the sense that they are then left to manage situations by themselves (Sagar 2004, p. 109), which further exacerbate the lack of accountability and legal uncertainty.

When boundaries are blurred, the roles and responsibilities of volunteers involved in policing become unclear and uncertain. Citizens cannot distinguish between the types of policing actors and their respective roles and powers (Rowland and Coupe 2014, Bullock 2017, p. 347). It is unclear to the public what to expect from citizen volunteers in policing (Crawford 2008) and from the public police (Bullock 2017). Furthermore, the legal status of volunteers in policing is unclear also to the police (Van Steden and Mehlbaum 2019).

Legal uncertainty and lack of accountability thus put the legitimacy of policing at risk. Arguably, then, the future type and level of civilian participation in policing need to be a topic of democratic, political deliberations and decision-making. Although a comprehensive legal framework, in itself, does not necessarily affect the practice of delegating core police responsibilities to volunteers, it would ensure transparency and the consensus of public support needed to establish legitimacy in and of policing.

This study comes with a couple of limitations that may serve as suggestions for future research. We have problematised the delegation of responsibilities to citizens, but additional studies are needed to explore how volunteers not only participate in but also exert influence on the work of the police. Furthermore, our conclusions are based on a qualitative study in Sweden. Whether or not our findings from analysis are transferable to other country contexts needs to be investigated further. We would be keen to see country-comparative studies of police-volunteer relations, to learn if the blurring of boundaries and legal uncertainty in police-citizen partnerships is an unavoidable reality.

Note

1. All volunteer co-ordinators interviewed for this article were employed by the police authority.

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