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# Police trust-building strategies. A socio-institutional, comparative approach

Dorian Schaap

Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, Netherlands

## ABSTRACT

Police require public trust to do their work well. Recognising this, police organisations across Europe implement various methods to gain trust: trust-building strategies. Surprisingly, the field of trust in the police and police legitimacy has paid scant attention to what the police actually do to improve trust. The present contribution outlines an approach to understanding police trust-building strategies in their social and institutional context applying a comparative, dynamic perspective. Departing from the assumption that trust and legitimacy exist in a dialogue between the public and the police, the author argues that trust-building strategies develop in an unpredictable, dynamic complex of interrelated social and institutional factors. What is seen as a suitable trust-building strategy is determined by dominant ‘rationalised myths’, ways of thinking about what good police work should look like. These are shaped by a diverse range of different actors and factors. This complex affects each phase in the development of police trust-building strategies: problem recognition, generation of strategies, and adoption of strategies. Illustrating the value of the socio-institutional approach towards trust-building strategies, each of these phases is discussed in the context of a comparative, dynamic study of police trust-building strategies in England and Wales, Denmark, and the Netherlands. It is argued that this more sophisticated understanding of trust-building in its social and institutional context does not just tell us something about the police, but also helps us understand how state institutions shape and maintain their position in the complex environments of our changing societies.

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trust-building; police legitimacy; institutional theory; comparative

## Introduction

Once, in the perhaps not so distant past, the police were seen as a rock-solid institution, a ‘sacred’ foundation of Western society (Banton 1964). The police institution was thought to bring stability, order, and a shared sense of right and wrong (Loader and Mulcahy 2003). Trust and legitimacy was bestowed on the police without second thought – or so the myth goes. However, over the past decades, this stable organisation was criticised for being stagnant, conservative, ill-equipped for changing societies and evolving demands. This is said to have contributed to a gradual decline in police legitimacy and loss of its ‘sacred’ status. Reiner (2010, p. 96) argued that as a result, the police are now ‘beyond legitimation’, meaning that a partially delegitimised (or ‘desacralised’ (Loader and Mulcahy 2003)) police organisation is currently mainly relying on a pragmatic management of public opinion.

**CONTACT** Dorian Schaap  d.schaap@jur.ru.nl

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There is much to be said for such a pragmatic attitude. Nowadays, policing in many countries is in turmoil. Rapid organisational, technological and societal developments, coupled with strings of scandal, media campaigns, calls for increased efficiency and effectiveness as well as appeals for more openness and accountability on the subject of human rights, lead to continuously repeating cycles of reform across the Western world (Savage 2007, Terpstra and Fyfe 2013). This state was referred to by Brodeur (2005) as constituting a perpetual revolution, a 'Trotsky in blue'. Such a maelstrom of rapid change and development occurs in complex environments with many different actors, stakeholders, interests, and different local conditions (Punch 2007).

This raises many challenges for the police. How, under these dynamic conditions, do the police maintain (or improve) their trust and legitimacy in the eyes of the public? What do their efforts to achieve a 're-legitimation' (Reiner 2010, p. 99) look like? It is essential to have a police organisation that is seen as trustworthy (Goldsmith and Harris 2012): when the police are trusted, they can do their work more efficiently and effectively (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Jackson and Bradford 2010, Hamm *et al.* 2016, Stanko and Dawson 2016, Boateng 2018) and citizens will feel more secure (Skogan 2009). As the police represent the authority of the state (Bittner 1980), trust in the police also reflects the legitimacy of the state as a whole.

The various ways in which the police attempt to improve trust can be labelled trust-building strategies. Trust-building strategies are answers to the question of how 'institutional arrangements and practices associated with policing can be reshaped so as to make them more deserving of public trust' (Goldsmith 2005, p. 457). As such, trust-building strategies can also be designed to counteract vicious circles of mistrust – as mistrust usually fosters behaviour that results in more mistrust (Gambetta 1988) – and therefore maintain, rather than improve, legitimacy and trust (Suchman 1995).

This working definition of course raises several questions. After all, it depends on what aspects of 'trust' are referred to (and related concepts such as confidence, legitimacy, or satisfaction); it invites critical reflection on the discrepancy between substantive practice and image work or rhetoric (see Mawby 2002); trust-building can be aimed at various actors and audiences other than 'the public' in a general sense; and finally, in an international context we should recognise issues around (implicit and explicit) linguistic and cultural discrepancies surrounding conceptualisations of trust and trust-building. To a large extent, the answer to whether something can be considered a trust-building strategy lies therefore in the eye of the beholder. By necessity, this means that my understanding of trust-building strategies is a flexible one.

A term more popular in public administration and management research (Six 2004, Hamm *et al.* 2016), the study of trust-building strategies in particular can offer us fruitful perspectives on the relationship between the police and the public. Police organisations across Europe have worked hard on designing and implementing various trust-building strategies over the past decades. Nevertheless, these strategies have so far been severely understudied. In Western countries, research has primarily focussed on citizens' views of the police. While they are important and often yield rich insights, studies of public trust in the police often treat police views, actions and strategies towards the public as a given or a constant rather than dynamic, diverse, and shaped by their institutional as well as their social environment. Even (pseudo-)experimental evaluative studies of police trust-building activities, despite their obvious relevance, are typically primarily concerned with the effect of specific behavioural or policy interventions (see Macqueen and Bradford 2015, Sargeant *et al.* 2016, Worden and McLean 2017).

In this article, I aim to sketch the outlines of an approach to studying police trust-building strategies, which I label a *socio-institutional approach*. This approach draws from police scholarship, sociological theories on trust, and concepts that are central in the (new) institutionalism. By combining these notions, the weaknesses of these separate intellectual traditions are addressed. Police scholarship and writings on trust have often trouble doing justice to the institutional context of police strategies. The new institutionalism, on the other hand, traditionally focusses on continuity and convergence rather than change and dynamics (Scott 2008). Moreover, an emphasis on institutional environments often means a relative disregard for non-institutional (social, citizen-based) factors in shaping strategies.

This contribution advances theoretically and methodically on findings from my Ph.D. dissertation (Schaap 2018). Departing from the assertion that trust-building strategies are strongly determined by local and national circumstances, I will examine various phases in their life course in England and Wales, Denmark, and the Netherlands. For each of these three countries, one phase in the trust-building process (problem recognition, strategy generation, and strategy adoption) will be focussed on as an illustration of how every step in the formation of trust-building strategies is – at very different moments and in different ways – shaped by its institutional and social environment.

## A socio-institutional approach

As one observer already argued many decades ago, ‘the police themselves are the most important actor determining public attitudes’ (Gourley 1954, p. 135). This is because social legitimacy, which includes trust (Beetham 1991, Tyler 2004, Terpstra 2011), has a ‘dialogical character’ (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012). It contains an authority’s claim to legitimacy as well as how the ‘audience’ – the public – bestows legitimacy on that authority (here: the police). Based on the audience response, seen for instance in the level of trust, the authority can then adjust its claim, notably through particular trust-building strategies. Thus, these two sides interact dynamically. And as in any real dialogue, it is essential to note that the different sides have their own perspective and follow their own logic: the (social psychological) logic of citizens’ trust in the police is not the same as the (institutional and context-dependent) logic of police trust-building strategies.

Comparative and dynamic studies of police strategies, and specifically trust-building strategies, between various European countries or within countries over time are rare (but see Cassan 2010, De Maillard and Savage 2012, De Maillard *et al.* 2018). Nevertheless, we need to critically examine the context dependency of various strategies. We should also remember that trust-building strategies are by no means static concepts: as contexts change, so do trust-building strategies. Their birth, adoption and decline rely on complex processes (Kingdon 1995). By closely examining police trust-building strategies cross-nationally, we open up the black box that the police perspective on trust in the police currently often is. Yet if we want to understand this eclectic concept, we need a theoretical framework that allows for flexibility.

Trust-building strategies are an essential way to improve legitimacy: while all power systems seek legitimation (Beetham 1991), an authority cannot be legitimate without trust (Tyler 2004). Yet legitimacy is salient on the level of the institutional and organisational context as well as the social one (Meyer and Rowan 1977): it has a multifaceted character (Suchman 1995, p. 573). This means that a police organisation needs to be seen as legitimate (and hence needs to be trusted) by the surrounding agencies and government as well as by citizens. Institutions, organisations and governments can apply a range of strategies for gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy (Suchman 1995). Here, organisations are often influenced by ‘rationalised myths’. These are dominant images or role expectations of what a legitimate organisation should look like and how it should function, regardless of whether this makes the organisation ‘objectively’ (contentious as that term may be) work in the best or most efficient way (Meyer and Rowan 1977): myths can provide sources of legitimation (Crank 1994).

In the case of the police, rationalised myths are not hard to find (Crank 1994): remember for instance the myth that the police should primarily fight crime effectively (Loader 2014), or that they should above all prevent it from happening (Bayley 1996). Adopting such a myth, even if just ceremonially (Meyer and Rowan 1977), often entails an attempt to build legitimacy and trust.

Problematic is that such myths, and definitions and understandings of trust itself, are determined by a range of circumstances. The institutional, cultural, historical and even linguistic context in which the organisation is embedded can shape myths: ‘cultural definitions determine how the organisation is built, how it is run, and, simultaneously, how it is understood and evaluated’ (Suchman 1995, p. 576). This notion is of great consequence when we study trust-building strategies cross-nationally and dynamically.

Attempts to build trust can take the form of substantive management: 'real, material change in organisational goals, structures, and processes or socially institutionalized practices' (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990, p. 178). However, they can also involve more symbolic forms of management, such as the adoption of certain presentational strategies (Terpstra and Trommel 2009). Implementation of a trust-building strategy goes beyond creating new PR-materials – although image work can play a symbolic role in shaping the relationship between the police and the public (Mawby 2002, Reiner 2010). Most trust-building strategies will have both substantive and symbolic elements (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990).

Trust-building strategies develop in three stages: problem recognition, generation of strategies, and adoption of strategies. First, the precondition for forming a trust-building strategy is that trust in the police is defined as a problem that someone needs to do something about. This carries similarities to what Lee (2007) described as the 'invention' of fear of crime. Similar to Lee's understanding of fear of crime, trust in the police is an issue that appeared on the agenda (was 'invented'): it did so at a certain moment in time; for some reason; defined in a specific way; in some countries while perhaps not in others. It became a policy problem (Kingdon 1995) – where we should define policy on a broad, institutional level. Following Suchman (1995), the problem definition of trust in the police means that there is a perception that trust needs to be gained, maintained, or repaired: a precondition for trust-building. Yet trust in the police is also a concept that is understood differently in different countries (Schaap and Scheepers 2014) and that shows continuities and discontinuities over time. It can be redefined and reconfigured. This is important, because the precise definition of a problem helps shape its 'solution' (Kingdon 1995): the trust-building strategy.

Different policies (or measures in a broader sense) to address the problem can be generated. These will often be pushed by policy or professional entrepreneurs promoting their own visions or myths regarding the relationship between the police and the public (Oliver 1991, Crank 1994, Maguire 2014, Campeau 2019) and can take the form of trust-building strategies. For the police, both citizens and external stakeholders can help determine to what extent a trust-building strategy is accepted and adopted (Worden and McLean 2017). Important is that the police, despite many external pressures, also have a considerable degree of strategic autonomy in shaping, resisting or adopting trust-building efforts (Oliver 1991, Campeau 2019).

Police trust-building strategies reflect patterns of institutional continuity and change. As contexts differ and develop and the salience of specific rationalised myths evolves, so will policies to address the problem of trust vary between places and over time. But policing is often also subject to sudden events (Savage 2007). Events, especially crises and scandals, can help define a problem of trust, but could also create an 'open situation' (Kingdon 1995). Such open situations provide 'policy windows' – again, with policy defined broadly – implying opportunities for profound system change in police organisations (Terpstra and Fyfe 2013). Replacing or developing trust-building strategies often requires this kind of radical institutional change: an old system of thought, often with its old 'rationalised myths' will have to be delegitimised (Oliver 1992) whereas a new system requires its own legitimation (Crank 1994) before it is adopted.

Such change is often accompanied by strong tensions and conflict (Crank 1994, Worden and McLean 2017). Moreover, the switch to a new paradigm of trust-building, which is a type of police reform, is not necessarily based on research findings, evaluations, or 'technical effectiveness' (Crank and Langworthy 1992, Maguire 2014). Rather, it is shaped by unpredictable processes of interaction, negotiation, and conflict between a range of actors where myths or frames often play important roles (Terpstra and Fyfe 2014, Diderichsen 2017, Schaap and Terpstra 2018). Even if a strategy has a clear, straightforward, research-based purpose, it ends up in a complex organisation full of interdependencies, competing pressures, diverse interests, and unpredictable events (Baker 2018).

All of this implies that there must be strong differences between countries and between different moments in time when it comes to police trust-building strategies. While strategies, catchphrases, ideas and experiences more than ever before travel between countries (Brogden 2005, Jones and Newburn 2007, Baker 2018), with actors often claiming or expecting universal applicability of their

**Table 1.** The trust-building complex.

| Process:                 | Factors defining process:  | Context, events and agency:   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Problem recognition      | Conceptual understanding of trust<br>Diagnosis of problem  | Language and culture<br>Acuteness of problem or crisis  |
| Generation of strategies | Dominant rationalised myth<br>Main actors involved   | Influence from other countries or sectors<br>Ideology and politics  |
| Adoption of strategies   | Factors that stimulate the strategy<br>Factors that impede the strategy<br>Factors that transform the strategy | (Unexpected) events and open situations<br>Preferences of key individuals/actors<br>Police support<br>Historical and structural aspects |

ideas and concepts, problem definitions as well as perceived solutions are strongly culturally determined (Nelken 2010). Beyond the catchphrases and enthusiastic policy and professional entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1995), the realisation of a strategy can vastly differ according to context.

An illustration here is the policy transfer of zero tolerance policing from New York to the UK and the Netherlands. While the British and Dutch police organisations adopted various elements of the zero tolerance policing model (such as a more assertive street presence of police officers, more emphasis on small signs of disorder, and attempts to work in a more information-led manner), others, like the tough-on-crime mantra, were rejected by the new contexts (Punch 2007). The result was a strategy that, although it had the same name as the original American model, differed substantially from the blueprint.

Key terms and concepts are subject to change and different interpretation as they travel from one context to another (Twining 2004, Savage 2007). They are often translated and understood differently (Crawford 2009, Schaap and Scheepers 2014), or are incompatible with traditional cultural values and professional orientations in policing (Cassan 2010, De Maillard *et al.* 2018). This makes a cross-national comparative perspective essential.

Table 1 summarises the complex that surrounds police trust-building. Here, the form and contents of the different (policy) processes (problem recognition, generation of trust-building strategies, and adoption of strategies) are each defined by specific factors. Those factors are shaped, affected or awarded a certain degree of importance by a range of determinants: features of context, events or agency. All of these factors tend to change and evolve. An approach to studying police trust-building strategies hence has to take a dynamic approach as well as a comparative one. Throughout the rest of this article, I aim to show the contribution of applying a socio-institutional approach to three different countries, showing these dynamics in each of the three stages in the development of trust-building strategies.

## Methods

Three countries were selected for in-depth study of police trust-building strategies: England and Wales, Denmark, and the Netherlands. While they are all Western European countries, they also represent very different ways of thinking about the relationship between citizens and the state. I conducted semi-structured interviews with police officers on different levels in the organisation, scholars, civil servants and other actors involved with trust and trust-building in each country.

Fieldwork took place in England and Wales during October 2014, including interviews with 23 informants; in Denmark during January/February 2015, including 31 informants; and 22 informants were interviewed in the Netherlands between July 2014 and September 2015, with most interviews being conducted from June to August 2015. Most interviews in England and Denmark were conducted in English, while the ones in the Netherlands were done in Dutch and translated by the researcher.

Interviews took place on two different levels: national and local. Interviews on the national level aimed to gain an overview on global trends, developments, and policies, reconstructing trust-building in different periods over the past decades. In each country, I also selected multiple local areas

(representing police units operating in areas with different population density, from rural to metropolitan) where a number of interviews aimed to shed light on within-country diversity, and on how national-level developments affected trust-building on the local level.

## Analysis

Over the next section, I will discuss different stages of trust-building strategies in the three countries. For each instance, to show how they work in different contexts, one phase will take centre stage: problem recognition, strategy generation, or strategy adoption. As each country has a relatively long experience working with trust, reconstructing the problem recognition process in the first case (England and Wales) requires going back in time several decades. For Denmark and the Netherlands, I have chosen more recent examples where I focus on generation and adoption, respectively, of trust-building strategies. Each segment will be dominated by one stage, not because the other two are irrelevant in that context, but because this particular stage is in this case especially instructive. The other two phases will be discussed to the extent that they show the often unpredictable, dynamic effects of context, events and agency. The examples provided here are by no means the only moments that trust-building strategies were introduced in the country. They are selected from a larger number of trust-building efforts (see Schaap 2018), but together illustrate some of the complexity and diversity of trust-building.

### ***Problem recognition – England and Wales: the Brixton riots, the Scarman report, and a vulnerable Home Secretary***

Trust-building is not a new phenomenon. The first case will illustrate that cycles of trust-building have in fact taken place for a long time. Here, we will hence concentrate on events from the relatively distant past, when several seemingly disparate events and factors together shaped the recognition of trust as a problem.

In England and Wales, trust in the police has historically been a topic of interest: it was already one of the considerations surrounding the foundation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 (Lyman 1964, Reiner 2010). Great value was attached to maintaining at least a veneer of public consent for the police institution (Brogden 1982, Emsley 2003). It is the breakdown of this myth of consent and its consequences that make the early 1980s a particularly powerful example for the purposes of our analysis.

In post-war Britain, the rhetoric of consent had initially become so successful that, as documented in the introduction to this article, the police were considered a ‘sacred’ institution: an agency both inherently good and dangerous (Banton 1964, Loader and Mulcahy 2003). However, to some extent this rhetorical connection between the police and the public may have stifled thinking about trust and how to improve it: trust appeared to have been taken for granted.

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| DS:                             | Can you recall when the concept of trust or confidence was first used? Was it used already when you joined [the police]?   |
| Retired chief constable 1, E&W: | No. When I joined in 1958 there was complete, almost blind, acceptance of the police. Which was a paradox, because the standards in some forces ... in some forces, trust was clearly being abused. Yet the generality of views was that the police was one of the rocks on which society was built. |

While societal changes in the 1960s and 1970s changed the nature of police work, they did not immediately lead to a crisis. However, growing societal tensions climaxed with the wave of inner-city turmoil in the early 1980s, especially the 1981 Brixton riots. This multiday confrontation between the police and mostly black youth, sparked by a heavy-handed police operation aiming to fight street crimes in the area, dominated the news and public discourse for a considerable amount of time. The Brixton riots were followed by an inquiry by the respected Lord Scarman.



Significantly, Scarman reported that he had ‘no doubt that a significant cause of the hostility of young blacks towards the police was a loss of confidence by significant sections, though it should not be assumed by all, of the [...] public in the police’ (Scarman 1982, p. 79).

While Scarman’s problem diagnosis – he even spoke of a ‘crisis of confidence’ (p. 79) – and recommendations may not have been shared by everyone, his report clearly defined the problem of trust as ‘the most worrying development’ for the police at that time (Benyon 1984, p. 237). It should be emphasised, at the same time, that trust in the police as measured by survey data was still very high as compared to the present (Loader and Mulcahy 2003). Yet as Brogden (1982, p. v; emphasis in original) noted: ‘For an institution that prides itself [...] that it polices by consent, the riots were a salutary shock’. As a result, confidence became an important issue for the police.

On the political level, the newly appointed Home Secretary Leon Brittan introduced the concept of public confidence into policy making soon after the Scarman report was published (Bottomley 1986, Faulkner 2014, p. 90). A question on confidence in the police was included in the second wave of the British Crime Survey in 1984, and indicators of confidence have remained in these surveys ever since. Brittan’s tenure lasted only for a little over two years (June 1983–September 1985), but he played an important role in placing trust on the policy agenda. A former civil servant recalled this period in the following way:

Retired senior civil servant, Home Office, E&W: It was the first time that I became conscious of it as a subject that was going to be talked about for itself. [...] To take public confidence as a subject you look at first, and then talk about how you can improve public confidence [...]. That was the first time.

But why did Home Secretary Brittan introduce this concept? Based on the previous considerations, we may expect he was driven by notions from the Scarman report. However, in the words of this former Home Office civil servant, there were also more personal reasons.

Retired senior civil servant, Home Office, E&W: Leon Brittan’s position was complicated because he was following Willie Whitelaw, who was the most powerful person after the Prime Minister. [...] He didn’t have anyone to fear. Leon Brittan was a much less established character. He’d been Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but he hadn’t been a departmental cabinet minister. He didn’t have a very strong position in the Conservative Party. He was Jewish and was encountering some anti-Semitic feelings.

DS: Within the party?

Retired senior civil servant, Home Office, E&W: Yes. So his position was more precarious and he had to work hard politically to maintain his credibility and position in the party. That was the context, I think, in which he thought public confidence, which in some ways meant confidence in him, was a subject he wanted to build up.<sup>1</sup>

While reconstructing this process after several decades needs to be done with some degree of caution, it appears likely that a combination of factors – the reality of the riots and the Scarman report colliding with the myth of policing by consent, and the preferences and choices made by a vulnerable Home Secretary – may together have shaped the problem definition of police–public relationships as being one of confidence in the police.

Yet while this period saw the defining of a problem of trust, strategies addressing the problem had trouble materialising. Some of Lord Scarman’s recommendations, including reforms of the police complaints process and the creation of community platforms, were integrated in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984 (Savage 2007). Meanwhile, community policing experiments were initiated by various police forces (Interviews retired chief constables 1 and 2, E&W). These efforts, however, were soon interrupted by a societal crisis more serious than the inner city riots: the Miners’ Strike.



When asked why a community policing reform had not lasted in his force, one retired chief constable explained:

Retired chief constable 2, E&W: [The reason was] the Miners' Strike, which was a complete diversion of many a reform process. It was eighteen months of chaos. Most police officers were working twelve hours a day just to keep officers on the streets, because we had sent off so many north to Nottinghamshire and such.

Summarising, there was a clearly defined conception of confidence at stake. This was, at the time, perceived as a crisis. Confidence could rise to the top of the policy and professional agenda because of the perceived severity of the crisis, the role of key actors (first Lord Scarman, later Home Secretary Brittan), and the fact that historically, the English police prided themselves on their connection with the public. The policy window (Kingdon 1995) that had opened, however, closed again soon. After this successful definition of trust in the police as a problem, the processes of developing and adopting – quite heterogeneous – strategies were nipped in the bud by a new crisis that diverted most police and government resources: the Miners' Strike. Trust-building ideas of increased fairness in policing and of proximity policing would take some time to regain their place on the agenda (the former with the Macpherson report (1999), the latter with the rise of neighbourhood policing in the early 2000s).

### ***Generating strategies – Denmark: reinventing trust-building after a rocky reform***

For the next section, to illustrate especially the generation of strategies, we make not only a geographical leap, but also a temporal one. Denmark, like many other countries in recent years, featured a large-scale police reform in 2007. The main goal of the police reform was that the public were supposed to get 'the best – and most – police for the money' (Holmberg and Balvig 2013, p. 43). This was to be achieved by treating the police more like a business (interview Retired police commissioner, DK).

There was little mention in the reform plans of a problem with trust in the police, but the committee designing the reform argued that citizens above anything else wanted the police to fight crime more effectively (Visionsudvalget 2005). The reform centralised the police system: the national commissioner substantially strengthened his position vis-à-vis the local district chiefs, while the number of police districts decreased from 54 to 12. This way, the districts were thought to be able to better address especially serious and organised crime. Moreover, much attention focussed on decreasing response times and improving clearance rates (Holmberg 2014). A performance management framework was instituted to benchmark the districts on, among other things, these criteria. This reflected an instrumental vision, where the police ought to emphasise efficiency and effectiveness.

The police reform faced a particularly problematic implementation. First, it led to a period of profound organisational chaos (Balvig *et al.* 2011, Holmberg and Balvig 2013, Kruize and Jochoms 2013). Most urgent were the failures of the new, centralised call centres which faced technical issues and had poorly prepared employees. Clearance rates dropped and police response to calls was slow or sometimes non-existent. A usually supportive conservative national newspaper (*Berlingske*) launched a public campaign focussing on police shortcomings. Public trust in the police took a serious hit, although it later recovered (see findings by Balvig *et al.* 2011, Schaap 2018). This was the first time that trust in the police in Denmark was viewed as being in a state of crisis.

The second problem was with the contents of the reform itself. Surveys and other studies consistently indicated that in spite of police performance and trust in the police having recovered, perceptions of police local affiliation remained poor. Similarly, other local actors noted a decrease in police local knowledge and involvement (Holmberg and Balvig 2013).

The core assumptions of the reform, derived from the New Public Management (NPM), were challenged by police chiefs who saw a mismatch between the national focus on effectiveness and efficiency, and priorities of citizens and various local actors (such as city councils, schools, and social services). These complaints were not immediately accepted as valid by the top of the national

police. In the police districts, however, initiatives started to grow rejecting the rigid focus on police performance and redefining police priorities in a broader fashion.

Deputy commissioner, DK4: We define also things [in our plans] that do not come from the national level. Service and openness, how to improve our dialogue, citizen panels, enhanced communication, meeting with people, partnerships. [...] The national police didn't see it as one of their priorities. [...] I've been there. I wasn't interested in burglaries, no no. I was interested in organised crime.

The problem went beyond the content of the target framework. The very essence of the police reform – a rationalised myth, if you will – that the police should be judged by their effectiveness in decreasing crime was challenged by district commissioners. Instead, a fundamentally different view on trust and trust-building emerged. In this new logic, the problem of trust was one of relations between the police and the public, not one of police effectiveness.

Police commissioner, DK1: We have gang crime, cybercrime, and all police officers are thinking that to be professional they need to increase their investigation skills, their tough-on-crime skills. The problem is: we see all kinds of crime, but the population in general don't. The biggest problem, if you ask them, is bikes. Bikes riding where they're not allowed. Mopeds, same thing. And dogs shitting on the pavement. You can ask them. And here we are being skilled to tackle gang crime and so on. That's what police think it means to be professional, but the population want us to be professional in the relations, have the time to talk to them. That builds trust.

This awareness by police chiefs on the district level implied a different understanding of what trust entails. This new problem definition of trust as one of being connected with citizens, led to the gradual development of a different way of thinking about doing police work – one that aimed to build trust through physical proximity, presence in local communities, prevention-oriented local neighbourhood officers, and collaboration with other actors. Some of those actors noted a distinct difference.

Manager, centre for multidisciplinary prevention, local administration, DK2: Five years ago, [the police] said about these prevention police officers: oh, they're so pedagogic.<sup>2</sup> It must be better to go with dogs and big cars. I think it's a different way of thinking around prevention now. I think there's more prestige in there than five years ago. [...] I have discussed this often with police, and they said at first: oh, it's only for policemen who couldn't get the real jobs. But they don't say that now. I think there's a change of thinking about prevention and collaboration with us, now.

The 2007 police reform had been pushed by actors on the national level. The redefinition or re-understanding of trust in the police as a problem of mainly local relations was done by district police chiefs under pressure of other local actors, citizens, and events (such as several public order events where a lack of local affiliation had given the police trouble). An important condition, however, for them to design trust-building strategies was actually created with the police reform: districts had become much larger. While this had been intended to make the police more efficient and fight serious crime more effectively, it also gave district police chiefs more possibilities to distribute resources, and set different priorities. Several districts decided to use this increased clout especially in more

problematic areas and neighbourhoods. The generation of this strategy was clearly still in progress, but the contours of a proximity or community-policing inspired model were visible.

Police commissioner, DK3: We increased the size of the police station [in that problematic neighbourhood], and today we have 26 police officers in that station, covering the area. [...] We believe it is important to have this local police in the community being able to build trust, work closely with the community, the youth clubs, the sports clubs, the management of the area, representatives from the inhabitants, immigrant groups and so on. So they get to know the area, the young people and the old people, and vice versa.

Such investments in local police work were not, initially, understood or appreciated by everyone in the police organisation. There was very much still a struggle going on between one model of thinking about the relationship between the police and the public, which centred around serious crime, and another one emphasising trust-building on the local level.

Police constable 6, DK2: Actually, it's quite funny. When I first went out here, people thought I did something wrong in Copenhagen. They thought I was going through internal affairs or something: why would I come to the local police otherwise? [...] They didn't believe I was actually headhunted. Why do you do that? Don't you like being a policeman anymore?

Concluding, the generation of a Danish trust-building strategy was sparked in different ways by the 2007 police reform. This reform gave rise to a problem with trust (framed as the result of a disconnect between what citizens and local partners wanted and police priorities), but it also helped provide a 'solution', through the expansion of district chiefs' power. The problems and criticism the national police encountered in the first years after the reform then created a window for a new way of thinking to emerge. Several district chiefs, stimulated by other local actors and influenced by colleagues, began to generate local answers to the problem that the police were seen to focus too much on national priorities and serious crime. This saw, arguably, the emergence of a new type of rationalised myth emitted from district chiefs' offices: that good, trustworthy police work was done in collaboration with the public on the local level. At the time of the research, actors on the national level seemed, to some extent, to acquiesce to this emerging strategy. It had, however, not been fully adopted and it was unclear to what extent the police districts outside of the four visited by the researcher shared these initiatives. There remained a tension between national demands and targets and a local desire to experiment with proximity policing and adjust to the local context, such as problematic urban areas or rural communities traditionally distrusting the police.

### ***Adopting strategies – the Netherlands: a national police organisation and the service model***

Not unlike in Denmark, the police in the Netherlands have recently undergone a massive reorganisation. In 2012, the old 25 regional police forces (and one national force) were merged into one national police organisation under the Ministry of Security and Justice. Like in Denmark, the reform had a long history and featured tensions between different actors and parties. And this reform, too, was accompanied by certain ideas about trust, albeit different ideas than in Denmark.

The background and initial implementation of the national police reform have been documented extensively elsewhere (Terpstra 2013). The Dutch police system had long been characterised by a balance between actors emphasising national and centralist tendencies (such as the public prosecution service and the Ministry of Justice) and those representing the interests of regional and local actors (mayors, regional police chiefs, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Yet the years leading up to the reform had seen a gradual albeit irregular trend towards a strengthening of the national level versus actors representing regional and local interests (Schaap and Terpstra 2018). A crucial step was the merger of all policing affairs with one national police chief constable in a single ministry

under one minister in 2010: Ivo Opstelten, a former mayor of Rotterdam and mentor of prime minister Mark Rutte. This combination of a massive structural change and a single, powerful individual being in charge created a policy window for adopting and implementing, among other things, a new trust-building strategy.

In order to make the strongest possible case for a national police force and convince potential opponents, minister Opstelten had integrated a wide range of goals in this police reform. A national police organisation was supposed to increase police effectiveness and efficiency, foster democratic accountability, change police culture for the better, diminish red tape, stimulate police professionalism, improve the local affinity of the police and increase public trust (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie 2012, Terpstra 2013). Later, it was also argued that it would be cheaper. The national police system was presented as a panacea. To make the case that it would improve trust, the new system also came with a new trust-building model: the so-called 'service model' (Biemolt *et al.* 2012). The logic behind this model was phrased as follows:

The police have a great interest in providing a good service, because this can safeguard their image. Additionally, citizen satisfaction is an important lever to [gaining] more trust. Citizens' personal experiences with the police have the largest influence on public trust in the police. (Biemolt *et al.* 2012, p. 13; my translation)

This service model provides a very specific way of thinking about trust, in which the very concept of trust appears to gain a different meaning. The problem of trust becomes one of delivering a good service. That interactions are vital in shaping public trust is a central assertion in police scholarship – especially in procedural justice theory (Tyler and Huo 2002). But the other aspects (service and satisfaction) are not. The service model is influenced by the NPM, given its propensity to viewing citizens as customers and emphasis on efficiency, yet it is not primarily concerned with crime fighting and police effectiveness (as was the focus around the 2007 Danish police reform). The core logic of the Dutch service model is that citizens who are satisfied with police 'services' will trust the police. This service is supposed to be delivered through a 'multichannel' approach – although we will see that this can also reflect considerations of efficiency, rather than trust.

What does this rapidly developed trust-building strategy mean in practice? First, it implies a redefinition or re-framing of proximity. Second, it concerns the way crime is being reported. Third, for a number of crime types, police feedback to those who reported it became mandatory.

### *Redefining proximity*

The police continues to rhetorically work with a proximity-based strategy while substantially diminishing their physical presence on the local level. Many police stations were closed and the opportunities for citizens to physically report crimes were greatly diminished (see section b). Although this was mostly due to budgetary reasons, many within the police argued that this was simply a process that contemporary organisations go through. Comparing the police to banks, it was argued that citizens have little need for police stations. The importance of visibility was reframed to entail visibility in different ways, including online presence. A need for physical proximity, on the other hand, was often referred to as old-fashioned: a new myth was instituted as the old one was explicitly delegitimised (Crank 1994).

Member regional unit command 1, NL3: It is sort of a myth: you need to have police stations in your town because of security. You need to have a neighbourhood officer on the street because of security. Well, I'd much prefer that neighbourhood officer to be dealing with the problems in his neighbourhood and to show on Twitter what he is doing. [...] I sometimes consider a neighbourhood officer using Twitter the new form of proximity.

On the operational level, some officers – while acknowledging that times are changing – voiced different measures of concern regarding the increasing physical distance to citizens.

Neighbourhood officer 2, NL1: Nowadays [citizens] reach out to you differently: with Twitter, or with Facebook, or Whatsapp, or sms text messages, e-mail, or they leave a message through a call centre. [...] It's old-fashioned to come to a police station, talk with you for a bit, that's really happening less. [...] We have to go along with Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, but we should not forget about normal, old-fashioned warm contacts. Five minutes with inhabitants of the neighbourhood. To see for yourself, hear, feel, smell.

### **Reporting crime**

Consistent with the theme of comparing the police with banks and other modern companies and organisations, the system for reporting crime was drastically revised. The authors of the initial service model document formulated a list of possible ways to report crimes to the police (Biemolt *et al.* 2012). Curiously, these possibilities (listed in order of police preference) featured reports through the internet and telephone before physical reports at the police station. Such service at a distance, with a strong emphasis on technological solutions, was viewed as something the public wanted from the police and was argued to improve police legitimacy.

Member regional unit command 2, NL4: It would be strange that if you wanted to report a crime in Amsterdam, you would have to wait for an hour, while in Limburg you could do it by telephone and in North Netherlands you could do it at a 3d-location.<sup>3</sup> [...] That citizen has the right to one single level of service. The Rabobank wouldn't want to say that digital banking is only possible in the south of the Netherlands, either. So this is really geared towards the citizen. In the end, the whole matter of legitimacy is easier to realise on the scale of the national police than 26 times on the local level.

This single level of service-argument was often used. The emphasis on uniform service as a trust-building strategy was part of a broader drive in the national police to counter 'fragmentation' in the police system and foster unity (Schaap and Terpstra 2018). Again, on the local level, many officers took a more cautious view, considering the downsides of such a distant approach towards citizens' reports.

Chief basic team 4, NL2: [Citizens] can always walk into this place, but this is the central police station. So if you want to go from [this outlying neighbourhood] to here, it will certainly take you half an hour by bike. [...] Where necessary, for instance with old people who can't come here but there's been a burglary and we want to get their report, we can go there with our mobile stations and get reports there. Yeah, in that way we try as much as we can to fill the gap that sort of came into being.

### **Mandatory feedback**

A third element of the service model is that of mandatory feedback. Again drawing parallels between the police and (commercial) businesses, the idea was that citizens ought to know what the status of their investigation is. As a result, with the national police reform came an obligation to provide feedback to citizens on the status of their case, two weeks after the original report was filed. The rationale was that citizens who do not receive such a follow-up will think they are not being taken seriously and may lose trust in the police (Kort and Terpstra 2015). This measure was taken for all so-called high-impact crimes (burglary, mugging, assault, and some other crimes).

Chief basic team 2, NL1: We want to increase the reliability of and the trust in the police. We are working on that. If people report something to the police, they will get feedback. [...] People want to know what happens with a report. [...] As a police officer, you must let citizens know how things are going and in the case of a simple investigation, you should let the victim know what happened with their report.

DS: Why is this so important?

Chief basic team 2, NL1: Because it increases trust in the police, of course. [It shows] that we are a reliable agency and that people are also allowed to expect something of us.

At the same time, while many police officers of very different ranks argued for the importance of keeping citizens up to date about their report, scepticism was voiced over the way the measure was being implemented. There was concern over the fact that mandatory feedback became part of a quantitative target framework and that a standard letter was often used – suggesting more a ceremonial adoption of the measure than a substantive one.

Retired chief constable 2, NL2: It's not personal. What happens now with that feedback is that some sort of automatic letter is being sent: [...] for the time being we're not doing anything with your case, blah blah blah. Well, that absolutely doesn't increase trust.

Summarising, a trust-building strategy was generated and rapidly adopted throughout the Netherlands, simultaneously with a large police reform. The conditions for the rise of the service model trust-building strategy were created by the national police reform. It fit with a broader centralising tendency where local physical presence was deemed less important (having the added advantage of presumably being cheaper). The service model, while relegating physical proximity to the status of myth, comes with a new type of mythology: it assumes that trust is determined by the uniform service the police deliver, irrespective of distance, and that citizens evaluate this service in the same way they would that of any commercial actor.

There are possibly serious drawbacks to applying the service model as a trust-building strategy. One could question the 'rationalised myth' that a trusted police organisation operates in the same, distant fashion as a modern bank. Quantitative and qualitative studies have challenged these notions (Kort and Terpstra 2015, Boekhoorn and Tolsma 2016). Terpstra *et al.* (2019) have matched various elements of the service model with a rising 'abstract police', where the police organisation becomes disembedded, distant from the communities being policed. The risks here are not dissimilar to what the Danish police experienced after the 2007 reform.

## Conclusions and discussion

The three examples of trust-building efforts have several things in common. First, while I concentrated especially on one phase per country, it should once again be noted that all three phases of trust-building were present in each of the three cases. Second, they concern trust-building strategies in relatively similar, Western European countries. What they also shared was that efforts were pushed by specific policy or professional actors who were reasoning from particular 'rationalised myths' about how good, legitimate, trustworthy police work should look (Meyer and Rowan 1977, Crank 1994). Additionally, with varying degrees of success, they attempted to make use of policy windows, opportunities for pushing change opened by events or circumstances (Kingdon 1995).

At the same time, the differences between these trust-building strategies go far beyond their level of adoption in the police organisation or their different moments in time. They were rooted in often fundamentally different types of problem recognitions (both conceptually and in terms of problem diagnosis). Diverse actors were involved with the strategy, often pushing radically different rationalised myths on what good – trustworthy – policing should look like (Crank 1994). This means different conceptualizations of trust, as well, rooted in the cultural, temporal and institutional context of the actors involved.

Within adopted strategies, discrepancies, tensions and diversity exist. For some, such as community policing, such discrepancies are part of the need to adjust to local contexts. But for other strategies, the inconsistencies (for instance between rhetoric and reality, or between contradictory elements within a strategy) probably also reflect police responses to contradictory demands from their social and institutional environment.

For properly understanding trust-building, the specificities of national contexts are an important dimension. As De Maillard and Roché (2018) rightly noted, viewing policing systems in terms of broad models is not going to offer much help. Rather, trust-building strategies are shaped by often unique national and cultural characteristics. While such national, historical and cultural factors did not receive much attention over the preceding pages, they are a part of the socio-institutional framework and should not be discounted. In that sense, this study resides firmly in what Tonry (2015) called the third generation of comparative criminal justice research. However, the socio-institutional framework outlined in this article can contribute not just to observing that national context is essential, but also to how and why it is. I discuss three examples loosely connected to the three phases of trust-building.

First, due to the fuzzy nature of the concept, actors' understanding of the problem of trust itself is very much configured by historic, systemic and cultural contexts – a factor that policy makers and other actors are often quite unaware of. Generalising considerably, trust is historically understood in Denmark as a trait inherent to the relationship between a benevolent state and a well-ordered community. In the Netherlands, it is considered more a scarce good that needs to be earned from a critical public by hard-working public agencies (Schaap 2018). In England, it is a notion married to mythical ideas or even memories of a national icon partly fallen from grace (Loader and Mulcahy 2003), but with continuing societal resonance (De Maillard and Roché 2018, Schaap 2018).

Second, generation of trust-building strategies is, as a result, similarly diverse. The shape of all trust-building phases is determined by a potentially wide range of factors, in which national context is key. For example, it remains an open question whether the inner city riots in England in the early 1980s would have had similar impacts on trust-building in the Netherlands and Denmark as it did in England. A key difference here is the rhetoric of policing by consent, which is absent in the Netherlands – a country where criticism of and resistance against police authority has been less in conflict with national values. Similarly violent riots in Denmark (in Nørrebro, Copenhagen) in 1993 did not lead to a perceived crisis of trust, because the problem was framed as merely one of riot police tactics and not of the police function itself (Schaap 2018).

Third, the adoption of English community panels and institution of the Police Complaints Authority in the 1980s were at least partially shaped by a tradition of valuing democratic accountability (which is, again, connected to policing by consent). The Dutch service model is, next to a trust-building strategy, also the latest step in a decades-old debate on unity and fragmentation in the police system, the salience of which is determined by the police system's history as an amalgamation of British, French and German influences (Schaap and Terpstra 2018). These differences between countries and their wider implications require careful scholarly attention, for instance through discussion on the role of the state and contested visions on the function of the police (Van Stokkom and Terpstra 2018).

As a final note, examples from other countries or sectors that look like they might offer the right way to go are also important – not for providing blueprints that can be copied, but as opportunities to draw elements from a model that looks like it is successful or legitimate elsewhere (Deepphouse 1996, Tonry 2015). Yet on a more fundamental level, the socio-institutional approach outlined in this article can help us understand the notion that despite evidence for policy transfer and diffusion, we see as much divergence as convergence when it comes to police strategies (De Maillard and Roché 2018). The scope of this approach hence goes beyond merely the study of trust-building strategies.

Where does this bring us? In the trust-building complex, once a problem of trust arises, it is far from predictable what sort of strategy will emerge from the 'primeval policy soup' (Kingdon 1995) of policing. After all, the logic of trust-building transcends the logic of citizens' trust in the police. While the relationship between the police and the public can be characterised as a dialogue (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012), the trust-building complex resembles more a group conversation where the police and the public are only two of a larger number of participants, and where the different actors seldom align. Strategies are often characterised by good intentions, but also by wrong assumptions, selective blindness, and communication errors. An observed lack of public trust in the police is only one factor that shapes police trust-building strategies. Improving public



trust and legitimacy, then, is not a matter of pushing the 'right' buttons on a metaphorical policy dashboard. Trust-building strategies, while goal-oriented, are multi-layered practices that also carry important symbolic implications beyond trust.

The police are an organisation operating in dynamic societal and institutional environments. Police scholars and practitioners as well as policy makers should realise that this basic notion carries extremely complex implications. Researchers need to take into account that understanding trust in the police requires awareness of the wider social and institutional environment. Trust cannot be studied in isolation from its professional and policy context. In studying this wider environment, we may reach more profound insights into how institutions, including but not limited to the police, shape their roles in turbulent societies.

## Notes

1. Brittan's political vulnerability has been noted by other sources, such as Alderman (1995) and Woodhouse (2004). His former Parliamentary colleague Jonathan Aitken (2013) considered an 'undercurrent of anti-Semitism' (p. 514) to be a contributing factor to Brittan's later forced resignation as Trade and Industry Secretary after the Westland Affair in 1986.
2. 'Pedagogic' is a different concept in Danish than it is in English (Levisen 2012). It refers more to educating and helping people and less to raising children. In the words of Levisen (2012, p. 143): 'the child's world has been projected to society in general'.
3. A 3d report is a report done through camera, in special booths usually attached to police stations (that are otherwise closed to the public).

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