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Nodal policing in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses the nodal orientation of the police, which is an innovative and controversial target of Dutch policing. This target states that the police should focus on flows, and on places where the various flows coincide. The success factors for implementation nodal policing are discussed as well as its (strategic) implications for Dutch policing. We focus on the key features of Dutch nodal policing; the strategies that have been followed to implement nodal policing, the current state of affairs of nodal policing in The Netherlands, and what the future prospects for nodal policing in The Netherlands are.

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Introduction

In 2005, the Dutch Council of Police Chiefs published a document entitled ‘The Police in Evolution’ (PIE). In the preceding decades, the Dutch police had followed the strategic course set out by the strategy document ‘A Changing Police’ published in 1977. PIE sets out ten strategic targets, and was intended to assist in pointing the way forward for future developments in the policing profession.

The fifth target of that document, which is also the most innovative and controversial target – is on the nodal orientation of the police. This target states that, in addition to its traditional local orientation, the police should focus on flows, i.e. on infrastructures such as road systems, waterways and communication networks, and on places where the various flows coincide, i.e. the infrastructure nodes. This control task should be aimed at people and at groups of people rather than at criminal offences. This article aims to describe the various aspects and assumptions of the nodal orientation, discuss its success factors for implementation and its strategic implications for Dutch policing. The research question is fourfold. What are the key features of Dutch nodal policing; what strategies have been followed to implement nodal policing; what is the current state of affairs of nodal policing in The Netherlands; and what are the future prospects for nodal policing in The Netherlands?

This article is partially based on a research report (Bekkers, Van Sluis and Siep, 2006) that was commissioned by the Police and Science Program, where five cases in which a nodal orientation seemed to surface were studied, based on literature review and field research. Also twenty key respondents, including practitioners and scientists, were interviewed. The material has been updated for this article with additional literature research, nine additional interviews and the findings of recent studies into Dutch nodal policing.

1. Nodal policing: assumptions and background

Shearing refers to nodal policing in the context of the growing diversity and multiplication of auspices and the providers of policing. “The police are only one node in a network that works to govern security” (Shearing, 2005: 58). The Dutch police have interpreted nodal policing in PIE in a rather novel way, inspired by Castells’ understanding of the network state (1996).

1.1 The network state

Nodes and flows have become important bearers of economic and socio-cultural processes and activities. There are five types of flows: people (using physical space), goods (using physical space), energy (mainly using physical distribution networks), capital (using ICT-infrastructure in the virtual worldwide capital market as well as in physical space), and information and communication (using virtual space). These flows make use of physical distribution networks, as well as occupy space in the virtual world. The various forms of physical infrastructure, such as roads, waterways, air traffic, railway transport and networks for the distribution of electricity, gas or water have become more and more intertwined and mutually dependent. The linking of flows and infrastructure creates crucial new vulnerabilities at physical nodes, where the flows come together.

Information and knowledge have become the prime raw materials for the creation of services today. In a globalized world, the exchange of information occurs on a worldwide scale. ICT plays an important role in this exchange, because information and knowledge can be digitized. ICT is primarily deployed to connect organizations, to share information and to communicate, at any time and from any location. According to Castells, space in modern society has a dual character. Locations may be physically separated but are nevertheless electronically and organizationally connected in an interactive network of people and activities. Information is vital in both physical and virtual spaces, because people act and give meaning to events based on this information.

The vulnerability of nodes and the vital role that they play in the network society offer interesting loopholes for criminal organizations and terrorist groups. Criminals and terrorists understand the possibilities that this context creates and have not hesitated to make use of them. “Open borders, freedom of mobility and

computerization offer opportunities not only to entrepreneurs and citizens, but also to criminal individuals, organizations or networks” (PIE, 2005: 21-22).

1.2 Dutch nodal policing

Dutch nodal policing involves the intensive control and monitoring of infrastructure and the flow of people, goods and money that move along the various forms of this infrastructure. The police act where flows across infrastructures arrive at particular places, such as at the nodes in the infrastructure networks (PIE, 2005: 76). Each movement of flow and infrastructure requires specific applications for police interventions that fit the characteristics of the particular type of flow or infrastructure.

In general, the police force is able to apply two types of interventions: setting virtual traps at the access or exit points of flows, and moving with the flows within a specific type of infrastructure. Examples of the first type of intervention are traffic controls at the access points of a highway, at the server of an Internet provider, and the scanning of ships for the presence of nuclear material with radio frequency identification. Examples of the second type are traffic patrols on highways, entering discussions in an extremist or religious fundamentalist chat room, and registering transactions that involve large sums of money in the financial flow.

Intensified monitoring of flows and nodes can pose a threat to the privacy of citizens, because non-suspects will also be monitored and surveyed simply because they are moving within a particular flow. However, the authors of the PIE report believe that citizens would accept this intrusion of their privacy, because it prevents them from being subjected to other kinds of instruments that would infringe on their rights and privacy even more. In other words, these controls are reasonable. The authors refer to a ‘social contract’ in which citizens accept that the expansion of some police powers counterbalances their ability to move around freely and safely. There will always be a tension between protection by the government and protection from the government; the right balance is not static but shifts and adapts along with the societal context (Welten, 2006).

2. Success factors

Nodal policing is primarily viewed as an operational concept in the Dutch police interpretation, but with far-reaching strategic implications. In the following sections we will discuss four factors that we consider to be critical for a successful implementation of nodal policing.

2.1 An effective implementation strategy

Innovations in Dutch policing have a high turnover rate and run the risk of remaining mere ‘verbal innovations’ (Van Twist, 1995). They tend to be incorporated into the vocabulary of police managers, who pick up new ideas very quickly and view them as a magic formula for improved performance. However, these new ideas often lack proper implementation, and differences remain in their interpretation and execution (Hoogenboom, 2009). On the other hand, since the Dutch police forces are relatively small in size and are increasingly unified, they serve as fertile breeding grounds for innovations and strategies that are aimed at the systematic development and dissemination of good practices (Punch, 2006). Finally, a link should be made between nodal policing and concrete police strategies that have proven to be successful (Braga and Weisburd, 2006). A partially bottom-up approach would fit in better with the existing police culture because of its more practical orientation (Ferwerda et. al, 2009). These typical features of Dutch policing must be taken into account when implementing the concept of nodal policing.

2.2 Multi-agency and multi-level policing

Nodal policing involves the division of roles and requires cooperation between actors. Multi-nodal and infrastructural nodes have many different ‘owners’, who may be public or private, each with their own interests, duties, responsibilities and powers in supervision, enforcement and investigation into suspect activities. A nodal orientation relies on the quality of cooperation between a diverse range of public and private actors involved in security in a flow or infrastructural node, in the form of network-like structures. Cooperation between the police and other agencies, on a local, national and international level, is necessary, as networks of flows move above and beyond national borders.

For every flow, infrastructure and node, the police must consider their position and rethink their core tasks as set out in the PIE report: will they be the leading actor, and, if not, what would their exact role be? Core tasks must be executed within multi-disciplinary processes and hybrid public-private structures, in which the borders between agencies tend to ‘fade away’ (Hoogenboom, 2009). This serves to complicate the execution of core tasks.

2.3 Information-driven policing

Information is both an instrument of and a condition for nodal policing. The appropriate use of information fits into the longer-term development of intelligence-led policing, i.e. the systematic use and exploitation of information and an improvement in the information warehouse of the police (Tilley, 2003). Nodal policing requires proper criminal analysis in order to assess the risks inherent in vulnerable nodes, which can be a fulcrum for criminal activities and for movements within flows. Nodal policing requires a detailed picture of relevant nodes and their sub-nodes. The police must therefore develop an information strategy that makes provisions for the peculiarities of specific flows and nodes.

In order to build up a strategic informational position, the exchange of information with the other parties involved and the mutual adjustment of information strategies developed by others must be considered. The quality and availability of information from various sources is crucial in order to ensure effective intervention by the police. The police need to collect and combine both hard and soft information and develop adequate interventions. The importance of intelligence accentuates the need to cooperate with other agencies that are collecting information while investigations are ongoing. Information has to be sought out and utilized from various sources and linked to create intelligence, for instance through the use of risk definitions, selection and interpretation based on profiling.

Both the strategies of moving with the flow and of setting virtual traps at access or exit points of the flow can be applied. This requires a shift towards a more proactive style of criminal investigation aimed at monitoring suspect movements in flows, a shift that usually involves the use of high tech detection technology that should be linked to the characteristics of the flows and nodes. An operational

follow-up after a hit from the technology is essential to ensure that the process is complete and effective.

2.4 The position of the police in society and their relations with citizens

The tasks of the police should be determined in close interaction with administrative authorities and citizens, as this would increase the amount of legitimacy that the police have in contributing to solving social problems. However, one challenge is that while community policing and area-bound policing systems are connected to the existing political administrative structures and the living environment of the citizens, there are no identifiable communities of citizens in flows and nodes. Linking the various existing sources of information creates new information power and intelligence about the whereabouts of people, thus opening doors for new and more refined forms of control. In order to prevent this concentration of information from being abused, a system of checks and balances must be put in place. It is important to note that nodal policing is not just a technology-driven intervention, but is also politically sensitive and requires effective democratic control.

The fact that non-suspects are monitored simply because they are moving within a particular flow will have a negative impact on societal support for the police. Thus, a more developed strategy for dealing with all the information that has been gathered and the implications for privacy should be put in place by the police. However, profiling can help in providing tailor-made solutions, for example through the use of privacy enhancing technologies like intelligent cameras.

3. The findings of empirical research: the current state of affairs

Several perspectives are explored in this article to assess the current state of affairs of nodal policing: an analysis of the strategy adopted by the Dutch Council of Police Chiefs (Section 3.1), a number of nodal practices that have surfaced (Section 3.2), three police forces and their strategies implementing nodal projects (Section 3.3), and an assessment of the current state of affairs of nodal policing (Section 3.4).

3.1 Disseminating the concept of nodal policing

Immediately upon the public launch of the PIE report in 2005, the document became mired in controversy. The press produced an image of nodal policing as a ‘Big Brother’ form of control where everyone would be checked up on and nothing would remain private. This image proved to be an obstacle to acceptance of nodal policing in the police forces. Another obstacle was that the PIE report was launched by the chief of police of the Amsterdam-Amstelland police region, which prompted a typically Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) reflex from other chiefs of police because they found the report to be much too Amsterdam-centric. Yet another obstacle was that regional police policy plans had to comply with the PIE strategies. This often collided with the development of regional visions on police work and police policy. Hence, the members of the regional executive board did not feel committed to the PIE’s content. A final obstacle was that PIE was written by a small group of high ranking police officers and scientists, who had not put any effort into consulting with the Public Prosecutors Office, mayors or police force managers. This lack of consultation caused irritation, even at the level of the Dutch national government.

After nearly a year, the Dutch Council of Police Chiefs established a team of PIE ambassadors, each of whom was a high ranking police officer, to motivate and convince the police forces to implement the ideas put forward in the report. The team was accountable to a steering group that was chaired by the chief of the police force of Amsterdam-Amstelland. The PIE and the concept of nodal policing itself received a boost as a result of the work of these ambassadors. One of the first initiatives of the team was to pay visits to and conduct interviews with key players in Dutch policing. The team also made working visits to all 26 police forces, where they conducted extensive discussions on the messages of the PIE report, based on a program that each hosting police force was allowed to draw up. Another initiative was the organization of roundtable discussions and seminars. Clifford Shearing was invited to the Netherlands to conduct a master class on nodal governance at the Dutch Police Academy.

In addition to these activities, the ambassadors catalogued 160 PIE-oriented projects. Before this, each police force knew nothing about projects taking place in other police forces. Only the ambassadors had an overview of all the projects

that were being implemented. In order to allow various segments of the police to learn from each other, the ambassadors published details of all 160 projects in a calendar. Quite a number of these projects showed elements of a nodal orientation. The work of the ambassadors was put to a stop in September 2008, earlier than planned. In the view of the chairmen of the steering committee, the ambassadors had successfully acted as initiators of change and had created a market for PIE. The findings of the PIE report had to be consolidated within the police forces, without the risk of the ambassadors becoming an obstacle to further development. All the police forces were informed that the ambassadors were ending their duties, and no evaluation of nodal policing has been conducted since then.

3.2 Nodal policing practices in The Netherlands

Van Bruul et. al. (2008) found 16 projects in The Netherlands that could be labeled as forms of nodal policing. "Based on a technical approach of traditional police work, these projects mainly focused on the deployment of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) equipment on infrastructural nodes" (Van Bruul et.al, 2008: 31). Despite the predominance of ANPR-related nodal activities, more examples of nodal practices can be found, which are discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1 'De Hoeksche Waard'

In the police region 'Zuid-Holland-Zuid' lies a rural area enclosed by a few highways called 'De Hoeksche Waard'. To end burglaries committed by criminals from outside the area, the police installed ANPR equipment on the access roads to the area. Mobile ANPR equipment was also used, creating 24-hour surveillance. The equipment matched number plates to a database of usual suspects, serious traffic offenders, pending fines, stolen number plates and persons wanted by the police. The system generated a hit if a car that was listed in one of these databases passed by. It also signaled to the officer on duty how to react in specific cases, based on specific protocol. This protocol enabled the police force to deliver tailor-made solutions, for example by registering, following and observing a car, or actually stopping a car and making an arrest. During the pilot period, less than one

percent of all passing cars generated a hit. Privacy rules were also drawn up during this period. The existing rules and the views of the Dutch Data Protection Authority allowed for a limited and specific use of information about citizens against whom there were no suspicions of criminal behavior.

After the pilot period, ANPR equipment was installed on two more police surveillance cars in other police districts. However, this created problems. The equipment was not always properly used and was often switched off. Not all 2000 surveillance personnel could be adequately trained. Information overload occurred: automatically generated hits were not properly followed up on. Finally, the police force had trouble keeping the information in the ANPR databases up to date. The data are stored away for future analysis and used if police investigations indicate their relevance. ANPR data are not considered to be for proactive use, although the police force does understand its potential for profiling and data mining.

3.2.2 Operation Daybreak

Daybreak is a nodal policing operation organized by the National Police Services Agency, and is aimed at ending a series of attacks on trucks parked along highways in the eastern part of The Netherlands. This form of ‘mobile banditism’ tends to be committed by criminal gangs from former Eastern European countries who usually return home at daybreak. In order to solve this problem, the National Police Services Agency collaborated closely with regional police forces and other law enforcement agencies, like the immigration authorities, customs, the public prosecution office, inspection departments from several ministers, and the German police. The operations were sometimes extended to achieve control over the entire stretch between Amsterdam and Warsaw. This operation was carried out 10 times a year. The combined powers and competencies of the parties working together created a complete and proper operation. All vehicles were checked at certain points in space and time, based on the experience, lessons learnt in the past, intuition and knowledge of the various professionals on the ground. Operation Daybreak made use of modern mobile scan equipment such as the backsatter, a vehicle that is able to produce a complete three-dimensional scan of another vehicle by driving around it. Concrete evidence discovered during this

operation, such as weapons or drugs, would immediately lead to arrest and prosecution. ‘Soft’ evidence, such as deviant behavior or particular things that caught the attention of the authorities would be registered for possible future purposes.

3.2.3 Football hooligans

‘Hooligans in the Picture’ was the name of a project initiated by the regional police force of Gelderland-Midden which was aimed at targeting high risk supporters and groups of supporters of football clubs in order to prevent hooliganism and to deter hooligans. Football stadiums are seen as nodes of risk-taking behavior. Groups were identified in and around the stadium through observation of supporters by spotters. The composition of the groups was analyzed and followers and leaders were assessed. The focus was to make these leaders less anonymous by calling them to account. If that did not work, leaders were monitored intensively and this was made known to them, with the aim of frustrating them in their undesirable behavior. The methods used require close cooperation and an open exchange of information between a variety of departments and agencies. Several information strategies were pursued, e.g. observation by undercover detectives, obtaining information from the stewards in the stadiums, obtaining information about offenders in their neighborhoods by interviewing social and juvenile workers, beat constables, pub owners, and by tapping databases from the police, social service, conducting fiscal investigations and so on. The information obtained from this variety of sources (hard as well as soft) was combined and analyzed in order to obtain a clear, more holistic, picture. This intelligence information was frequently updated: an actual and up-to-date picture of supporter groups was essential to ensure the success of the project, because of the high turnover rate of groups and leaders. The approach developed in this project was later implemented in other police regions.

3.2.4 Targeting mobile offenders on scooters

Within the police force of Amsterdam-Amstelland, a pilot was implemented that aimed to target offenders (‘mobile bandits’) who used scooters to steal from cars (Ferwerda et al., 2009). An analysis of police information, obtained from the

police information systems as well as from beat officers, had revealed the existence of a limited number of hot spots and of a group of juvenile offenders who committed most of these offenses. The police analysis also showed that offenders made use of a few particular entrance roads to the area. This information was obtained by combining information from traffic controls that registered the number plates of scooters with information about heavy offenders. An approach was developed in which cars were used as baits at hot spots. Offenders were caught in the act, but also a description was formed and passed on to the information analyst about all passers-by who exhibited a more than average amount of interest in the contents of the car. Another aspect of the approach was to reduce the anonymity of (potential) offenders by visiting their homes and giving them a warning. This project proved to be successful, as the number of thefts from cars decreased significantly once the project was put in place. After some time, however, the Public Prosecution Office put an end to this project, because it considered the control of hot groups to be discriminatory as opposed to the control of hot spots and hot times. The management of the police force then called in an independent expert to analyze this claim and dispute it. In the end, the project was approved by the Public Prosecution Office and extended to other districts as well.

3.2.5 Cybercrime

The Internet is vulnerable to terrorist attacks and relatively minor disturbances can have major consequences (WRR, 2008). Although the police employ more than 200 digital experts, the fight against cybercrime poses many problems because of its technical complexity, its international character, the speed, diversity and variety of high tech crime. Another challenge is that it lies outside the jurisdiction of administrative institutions. In order to effectively fight cybercrime the police must invest heavily in voluntarily cooperation with their partners. In general, however, the fight against cybercrime at the national level was and still is rather fragmented. Many public and private agencies are organized into the National Infrastructure against Cybercrime (NICC). A number of Dutch organizations have already been formed in the fight against cybercrime, such as the Cybercrime Reporting Unit, the High Tech Crime Team, the National Alerting

Service and the Computer Emergency Response Team (NICC 2009). In the Cybercrime Information Exchange, these actors exchange vital information, based on the model used by the UK's Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI).

A Programmatic Approach of Cybercrime (PAC) has recently been established to strengthen the fight against cybercrime. The PAC sponsors initiatives and proposals put forward by individual police forces to fight cybercrime. The police ally with private parties who are equipped with knowledge of criminal activities because of their information and experience in ICT. Although the police are actively seeking to build up these networks, they are still in the early stages. Most collaboration depends on informal and personal contacts. A multi-agency approach and public private partnerships with internet providers, hosting providers, computer emergency response teams and the antivirus industry are required.

3.3 The quest for the implementation of nodal policing

This section assesses three police forces, two larger and one smaller one, in their quest for the implementation of nodal policing.

3.3.1 South-Holland-South

The police force of South-Holland-South, which is a small force, has employed a Young Professional from the Police Academy start nodal projects other than ANPR projects. He drafted a vision paper with a scheme on creating a nodal strategy. Four rather isolated, small-scale projects were eventually initiated. The first project was aimed at analyzing the small seaport of Dordrecht and increasing the level of knowledge of the police about the port. This project was cancelled at an early stage because it would demand too much capacity. The second project was aimed at intensifying control of buyers of second hand goods, since there is room to buy and deal in stolen goods as well. The third project, which has not really taken off, was aimed at exploring the meeting places of Eastern European immigrants and at connecting them with crime data. The fourth project is aimed at nodal controls in traffic and at getting as much information out of speed controls as possible. A new registration form was developed for this purpose. The privacy

officer has disapproved of this project on the grounds that a lack of protection of peoples' privacy. This project is still being run.

The responsible project manager finds it difficult to keep the idea of nodal policing alive if it is to involve much more than the employment of ANPR equipment, especially since there is no authoritative definition of the concept and each police force must invent its own definition and approach. Nodal policing depends on the motivation of a small number of individuals and its concepts have not taken root in the higher echelons of the police force. If the project stops running, no one in higher authority would really be bothered by this, since there is no sense of urgency about it and it does not receive support and stimulus at the national level. Finally, the information warehouse of the force, which remains organized at the district level, is not yet suited to a nodal approach.

3.3.2 Rotterdam-Rijnmond

Two police force members are preparing the police force of Rotterdam-Rijnmond – one of the larger forces in The Netherlands – for implementing nodal practices. The two members make up the Nodal projects bureau. They have written a vision paper in which nodal policing is presented as being about selecting people in flows who pose a threat to safety. If (potential) penal behavior is suspected, the police work in a proactive manner to stop it from happening. The police have to strengthen their position on the pursuit of knowledge by generating and refining information from a variety of databases through the application of high technology. Nodal policing presupposes a well-stocked information warehouse and, as a part of Intelligence-Led Policing, acts as a supplement to regular policing systems. In March 2008, the police force management team agreed to this document, but it also expressed concerns about the consequences that nodal policing would have on the privacy of citizens

Some key lessons on how to deal with legal frameworks and the shifting balance between safety and privacy should be learnt during the experimental gardens. Four topics were selected as experimental gardens: nuisance in an old district, child pornography, police education and illegal garbage dumping in the port of Rotterdam. This last project was seen as a successful nodal project, since it aims to establish cooperation and the exchange of information between the many

agencies involved in the import and export of garbage. By focusing on the flows and nodes in the garbage transport chain, the parties involved get a better picture of the risks and of unusual (and punishable) behavior in the import and export of garbage through the port. Supervisory agencies cooperate more closely by means of better information exchange, coordinated inspection programs, joint risk analyses, alert supervision and transfer of duties. Supervision is focused primarily on high-risk companies and based on earned trust; companies with a good record are subject to fewer checks.

According to the Nodal Project bureau, the concept of nodal policing has been difficult to implement. They have encountered quite a number of obstacles, and a lot of time was taken up just to get projects going. In addition, there was no shared authoritative definition of nodal policing, which meant that they had to reinvent the concept on their own. The experimental gardens faced challenges such as the exchange of information, mutual cooperation, managing the information warehouse and dealing with the privacy issue. 'The intended strategy was to let 100 flowers blossom, but no bouquet has been made of all these flowers', according to one of our interviewees. Existing activities that seemed suitable for experiments were exploited. The two change agents assisted in getting projects started but then withdrew their support. Sometimes the work that they did was simply not enough to get a project off the ground.

Many members of the police force are aware of the subjects of the experimental gardens, but do not associate them with nodal policing. The change agents are faced with the problem of wanting to widen the scope of individual projects as nodal projects, but having this lead to a loss of support and interest in the forces. This also leads to a loss in the links that have been created between these (nodal) projects. An interviewee stated that: 'It is very difficult to mark out the concept, to get a grip on it and to give it a position of its own and to make it operational as a recognizable trajectory. It is not alive and kicking and nobody thinks it is that important. It is also very difficult to make results visible'. The two change agents do believe that there has been a change in thinking. The project needs to become a part of Information-Led Policing, and the information process has to be upgraded. In the meantime, the privacy issue must be resolved.

3.3.3 Amsterdam-Amstelland

The largest Dutch police force – Amsterdam-Amstelland – has put a great amount of effort into implementing nodal policing and into fitting it in with other domains of police work. The police force established a two-year program entitled ‘Supervision and Enforcement’, which was begun on January 1st 2006. The nodal orientation was interpreted as involving implementing police controls on nodes of physical infrastructure with the ambition to increase (feelings of) safety by influencing the behavior of people on these nodes. The program was run by a project team and headed by a program manager. The team encountered a number of difficulties in the course of the program’s implementation. Firstly, many team members were involved as part of their traineeship and changed positions after six months. These constant changes posed a threat to the continuity of the project. In addition, there were shortcomings in the transfer of duties and the exchange of information, partly because the records were not looked after properly and the program manager performed his duties without getting too involved. The former traffic police department (DCIV) was an important ally in the project, as it had developed its own approach towards police controls on infrastructural nodes. Another challenge was that it took the team a lot of time and energy to develop concrete products and to convince the police districts to include these in their annual programs and implement them in their work routines. The police districts already had a heavy workload and were reluctant to add to it. Finally, there were differences of opinion about the exact meaning of nodal policing, because quite a wide variety of police activities were labeled as such. In 2007, the management team of the police force decided to completely abandon the term nodal and introduced the term integrated control.

One of the targets of the teams was the development of experimental gardens, of which three were studied by Ferwerda et. al. (2009). The first has been discussed in section 3.2.4. The second is integrated traffic controls, aimed at the use of ANPR equipment, by combining traffic controls by the DCIV (Dienst Controle Infrastructuur Verkeer) with checks on overdue fines and on people who were wanted by the police. This project exposed the possibilities but also the limitations of ANPR. The weather, the quality of daylight, the readability of number plates, the angle and resolution of the camera, were all shown to influence

the scan speed (Ferwerda et. al, 2009: 85). The legal framework for the application of catch-scans also displayed its shortcomings. The third project was about a railway station in a suburban area that was expected to grow considerably in the years to come, and which would inevitably attract crime and nuisance. However, this project never went further than the drawing table, because the opening date of the station was delayed several times. The nodal orientation has had some successes at the operational level, but there were considerable difficulties in the implementation processes as well. Ferwerda et. al. (2009) explain that these difficulties resulted from the implementation strategies that were utilized; the strategies employed too much of a top-down approach, in a rather abstract and deductive way.

3.4 Assessment

3.4.1 Disseminating and implementing nodal policing

The PIE ambassadors have been successful at getting the idea of nodal policing onto the agenda of the police forces. Much of the initial resistance has dissipated, with PIE and PIE-related concepts gradually gaining recognition within the police forces and among stakeholders. The support provided by the ambassadors was greatly appreciated by the project managers in the police forces who were attempting to start nodal projects. Particularly in smaller forces the termination of the terms of the ambassadors resulted in a loss of connection with the broader development of nodal policing.

The concept of nodal policing should work as a sensitizing concept that would provide practitioners with a sense of guidance in developing nodal practices. It should function as a catalyst in producing motivational energy within the Dutch police system for continuing existing practices (Hoogenboom, 2009). The exact meaning and status of the concept, and the possible consequences it would have on privacy and arbitrariness, should unfold during the implementation process. However, the assessment of nodal practices conducted in this article illustrates a very different picture. As a rule, police forces keep the implementation of the nodal orientation down to earth and conduct it on a small scale, more as an accidental collection of isolated innovations than as experimental gardens. This is

also one of the reasons why there has hardly been any exchange of information about the nodal orientation between the forces. All in all, the connection between the nodal projects and activities has disappeared, thereby resulting in the under-utilization of the growth potential of the concept.

Due to the vagueness of the nodal concept, most police forces had to hire or reposition academic professionals to interpret it. The police forces used the nodal orientation as a container concept and started avoiding labeling new and existing nodal projects and activities as such. For example, ANPR is rather successful in Rotterdam, but it was not labeled as a nodal project, because others may view it as stealing a successful project by placing another label on it. The police force of Amsterdam-Amstelland even abandoned the use of the term nodal policing. The implementation of nodal policing has faced serious difficulties, although police forces, especially the larger police forces, have made serious efforts to apply the nodal concept. However, "it remains an abstract concept that requires a creative reflection on this new vision on police tasks. (...) In the past period the possible gains have not got sufficient attention and the chances have not been recognized" (van Bruul et. al, 2008: 155).

3.4.2 Multi-agency and multi-level policing

Most of the nodal practices that have been explored are in keeping with the 'Dutch' interpretation of nodal policing. However, they do not have all the critical factors for success. In nearly all of the nodal practices discussed above, some form of cooperation with other partners was aimed at by the police, both within and outside of the police force, and both public and private partners. Only in 'De Hoeksche Waard' did the police force adopt a 'go-alone strategy'. Most partners were active on the local or regional level, with some being active on the national level, and in only two cases did cooperation also include international partners. It must be noted that cooperation was often hampered by a lack of commitment, bureau politics, NIMBY symptoms or insufficient communication. Despite this, if the actors in a network perceived criminal activities as being a common urgent problem, they were found to be more willing to integrate their activities and work together to tackle the problems.

No explicit references are made to the core tasks of the police, except for the cases of dealing with cybercrime and the garbage chain project in the port of Rotterdam. However, when working together, clear demarcations are made about which tasks are performed by whom. Police officers are often the initiators of security networks and the most important actors in the initial phase of a network. But later on, they retreat from the network and want to play a more limited role, based on what they see as their core tasks (Terpstra, 2008). Most networks in nodal practices are in their early phases. In our view, the cybercrime case and the garbage chain approach utilized in the port of Rotterdam are the best examples of the effective use of the nodal orientation, although both are still in their early stages of development. Both these projects reflect the strategic potential that a nodal orientation is intended to possess according to PIE. The Rotterdam project incorporates a modern and shared vision on supervision and law enforcement in the port of Rotterdam, with the allocation of specific roles for the parties involved. This project also concretizes the abstract concept, which is an important factor for its continued success within the police force.

3.4.3 Information-driven policing

The garbage chain project in Rotterdam, the mobile offenders project in Amsterdam-Amstelland and ‘Hooligans in the picture’ are examples of intelligence led projects in which both system information and ‘street’ information were combined in an analysis to obtain a clear picture of what is going on in a specific flow. In some cases information overload occurred, like the use of ANPR in South-Holland-South.

There seems to be a tendency within some Dutch police forces to include the nodal orientation as part of Intelligence Led Policing (ILP). However, ILP has not yet been fully developed and cannot always serve as a solid basis for the implementation of nodal projects and activities (Ferwerda et. al, 2009). Moreover, the information warehouses of the police forces, especially the smaller ones, remain inadequate for really developing nodal policing. In all the cases, the exchange of information and the expertise to deal with this information is more or less present. Each agency has its own powers with its own limitations, and all of these must remain untouched. The exchange of information gives cause for

problems like the non-compatibility of systems and legal restrictions on the linking of information systems that are applied to safeguard the integrity of government. This is particularly applicable to the distinction made between supervising powers and the power to investigate. Permission must be obtained from the public prosecutor for the exchange of information between agencies for investigative purposes, or it has to be legitimized by a covenant with detailed guidelines for the proper use of this information.

In most cases the application of high detection technology implied the use of ANPR equipment or camera surveillance. However, it has been shown in the hooliganism case that low tech, but established, police tactics apply as well and should not be neglected. Naïve instrumentalism, i.e. unconditional trust in the possibilities and usefulness of modern technology, is a real danger that must be avoided, as was shown in the case of integrated traffic controls in Amsterdam-Amstelland. The proactive application of technology is still in its infancy. Risk profiling requires the knowledge and ability to unveil patterns and to interpret them accurately within their specific contexts. It also requires professional knowledge of specific nodes and flows. In practice, these conditions have not yet been met.

3.4.4 The position of the police in society and their relations with citizens

It is difficult to apply the logic of area bounded policing to a multi nodal and multi level policing. For instance, the port area in Rotterdam is a completely different and much more complex playing field, with only one inhabitant living in the area. The seaport police are faced with a strategic dilemma. On the one hand, they aim at intensifying cooperation with all the parties in the port area and at developing strategies to tackle crime on flows and nodes in complex and multi-level networks. But traditionally, the port of Rotterdam is dominated by powerful private interests groups who consider the port as their own backyard. Agencies that represent public interests such as safety and security, like the seaport police, experience difficulties to get access to these fixed and closed networks. On the other hand, the strength of the police in the port is their independency and their power to act against consensus in port networks if necessary. Their challenge is to

reconcile both roles, to keep their credibility within these networks and to keep the support from their political administrative stakeholders.

There are legal restrictions to the exchange of information between agencies in the Netherlands due to the need to ensure that there are checks and balances in the process. Up till now it has only been checks, and real balancing with a democratic anchorage has been absent. The legal framework with regard to the position of the nodal practices and what to do with (stored) information is, generally speaking, still underdeveloped. The privacy issue plays an important role in all the nodal projects that have been explored, but no truly satisfactory solution has been found in any of these cases.

4. Conclusions

The Dutch concept of nodal policing is an original one, distinct from more usual definitions of nodal policing. It is part of an approach that aims at interventions in different flows and nodes as a new focus point for policing, in an integrated approach towards safety, closely linked to area bound policing, where anticipation of the network society is a key element. The examples of nodal practices illustrate the richness and the potential of the concept of nodal policing. However, after the initial excitement the concept, the development and implementation have begun to display symptoms of stagnation. Nodal policing has begun to be implemented and there has been some progress, but it has not yet achieved a strong foothold. Our overview of the current state of affairs has shown that the concept of nodal policing continues to await further elaboration on its meaning, its strategic consequences and its consequences for police practice. For the time being, only modest use has been made of the virtual possibilities of nodal policing. Nodal practices have not been utilized as triggering devices for the strategic repositioning of the police. As long as there is no sense of urgency at the various levels of the police system that an integrated approach in various multi-level network settings is required to tackle crime in flows and nodes, the nodal approach will remain an abstract concept subject to a variety of interpretations.

4.1 Future prospects for nodal policing

New ideas and concepts are replaced quickly in Dutch policing, but real shifts in the way that police officers think and actually act take more time. It would be a challenge to find a balance between too many innovations with few interspaces on the one hand and inertia on the other. Innovations are better regarded as seeds to be planted than as plants to be potted. The Dutch police should set out a strategy of diffusion and adoption of nodal policing in a way that facilitates learning and the development and dissemination of good practices. Experiments and pilot projects organized around operational initiatives and activities are indispensable to determine the factors for success and failure and for testing new designs. The mobilization of the relevant partners, the development of a joint approach and of adequate interventions should be an integrated part of these experiments (Hoogewoning and Van Dijk, 2008). Variety and diversity are part of a well-considered learning strategy rather than the accidental outcomes of isolated innovations. A tailor-made nodal orientation is desirable for each specific flow or node. A good example of this is the recent establishment of a police agency within the Agency for National Police Services that will be responsible for creating national standards for the implementation of ANPR (Verhofstad, 2008).

Guidance and canalizing of nodal policing projects for the Dutch police is necessary in order to get through the experimental stages and to guide the implementation of proven good practices. As long as there is hardly any active support at the national level by the Dutch Council of Police Chiefs, the concept threatens to be nipped in the bud, before it has had a change to grow to maturity. Guidance is also needed to deal with the privacy issues that have surfaced in all nodal policing activities in concurrence with the Dutch Data Protection Authority. Such combined strategies would favor the growth of good practices on the one hand and would enable the proper management of the implementation of nodal policing on the other. In this way, nodal policing would be guarded against the dangers of simply being the latest rhetorical device employed by the police.

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