Literature on Police Reforms in the Nordic Countries

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ABSTRACT
Several European countries, like the Netherlands, England, Wales and Scotland have implemented or are undergoing major structural changes in order to centralize their police organizations. (Fyfe, Terpstra & Tops, eds. 2013) This goes for the Scandinavian countries as well. As an extra twist, this centralization is presented as decentralization reforms. The purpose of this literature review of the Scandinavian police reforms is to present the studies done so far\(^1\) of these reforms. This with a special address to the non-Scandinavian readers. The presentation is limited to studies of the reform from 2005 and onwards.

Most of the monographs are written in Scandinavian languages. Books in English are limited to Degnegaard's doctoral dissertation on the Danish police reform. However, four of the authors of the monographs have also presented articles on the studied reforms (Haraholma & Houtsonen 2013; Holmberg 2014; Holmberg & Balvig 2013; Johannesen 2015; Wennström 2013). A general discussion on the Norwegian reform is also found in Christenson et al. (2016). There are also articles in English of more specific studies like Haake et al. (2015) and Vuorensyrjä (2014).

The studies presented are of different character. First there are university and empirically based studies, such as Balvig, Holmberg and Nielsen's (2011) extensive empirical survey of the Danish reform; Degnegaard's (2010) dissertation which covers the same reform, from a management perspective; Haraholma's (2011) evaluation of the Finnish reform, here presented through an article in Fyfe et al. (2013), and Renå's (2016) survey report from Norway about police employees' and managers' attitudes to Norwegian police reform.

More specific studies are Vuorensyrjä's (ibid.) study of changes in organizational and occupational stress in the Finnish police force during the police reform years, and Haake et al. (ibid) on expectations on police leaders during major organizational change pressures. Second, with an empirical base, there are evaluations conducted by a government mandate, such as reports from the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret 2016) and

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\(^1\) Spring 2017.
from the Norwegian Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT (Difi) 2017).

Third, there are three books which are primarily based in organizational theory and police science and which analyze the basic assumptions behind the police reforms, often in a polemic and popular way. This goes for Wennström's (2014) and Björk's (2016) analyses of the background to the Swedish reform, and Johannessen (2015), who examines the development of the Norwegian police.

Key words
Police reform – Scandinavia, Police reform – Literature review, Police organization, Organizational change, Centralization

REFORMS IN SCANDINAVIA
In an article by Holmberg (2014) on the reforms in Scandinavia, he compares the finished Danish reform, an earlier reform from 2002 in Norway and the ideas behind the forthcoming reform in Sweden.

With reference to organizational changes in other European countries, he identifies five rationales for police reform. These are: adapting the police to ideas of New Public Management (NPM), with an emphasis on making sure that results can be measured and accounted for; adjusting to trends in crime, often with reference to the loose concept of organized crime; improving an ineffective police organization, increasing citizens' sense of security and decreasing costs.

Lower costs were not an issue during these reforms, but NPM was a big issue in all the countries. This also goes for adapting the police organization to new threats in criminality. The improvement of the police organization was not emphasized in Denmark but was highlighted in Norway after the massacre on July 22, 2011. While the Danish reform emphasizes objective measures of police effectivity, the Swedish and Norwegian ones were more concerned with citizens’ attitudes. Holmberg concludes that the reforms primarily seems to be aimed at strengthening governmental control, increasing uniformity and cost-efficiency and that the emphasis on a more local police was a way to promote the reforms

DENMARK 2007–2011
The goals of the Danish police reform, which started in 2007, was greater efficiency in the form of a higher clearing percentage and less criminality, swift response, openness and field work characterized by local knowledge and cooperation with local actors. Although the reform was presented as a decentralization, the number of districts were reduced from 54 to 12 and the power of the National Police Commissioner was strengthened.

The Best Police in the World. The Police Reform in Denmark
The most comprehensive of the Nordic studies is Balvig, Holmberg & Höjlund Nielsen (2011), Verdens bedste politi, politireformen I Danmark 2007-2011 [The Best Police in the World. The Police Reform in Denmark 2007–2011]. A summarized version is included in
Fyfe et al. *Centralizing Forces* (2013): Holmberg & Balwig “Centralization in Disguise – The Police Reform 2007–2010” (see also Holmberg 2014 for a summary). Their evaluation was based on multiple data sources, including:

- Nationwide citizen surveys covering contact and satisfaction with and trust in the police, victimization rates, evaluation of local conditions and citizens’ fear of crime; The surveys were carried through before, during and after implementation of the reform and could be linked to similar studies from 1998 and the early twenties;
- Nationwide interviews with a representative sample of police partners before during and after implementation;
- The police’s own yearly surveys among citizens who had made complaints to the police and had been in need of emergency police assistance;
- Participatory observations and interviews with police officers in two districts.

In general, the results showed a decline in citizens’ and police partners’ confidence in the police in the first years after the reform. The same goes for police efficiency. Police officers expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to do their job and rate of solved cases decreased.

However, three years after the reform was implemented, the satisfaction with the police on a national level increased to the level before the reform. In addition, the response time decreased. However, on a local level, citizens’ and local partners’ evaluation continued to be lower than before the reform. Local partners describe a loss in personal ties and that the police had lost their local affiliation. This lack of local knowledge forced police officers to rely more on force and numbers than before.

### Change Management Challenges in the Danish Police Reform


The method is described as multi-sited with field studies at the section for implementation at the National Commissioner’s Office, supplemented by field studies at an operational level, formal and informal interviews and discussions with top management as well as members at other levels of organization, and analysis of written documents.

Degnegaard finds a lack of organizational abilities in regard to change management and strategic change leadership as central factors in why the Danish police reform cannot be described as a success.

In the implementation of the reform he describes a technocratic process with its rational logic. There has been an excessive dependence on external experts and consultants without knowledge of the police organization’s special character. The planning of the process of the police reform was drawn up on management technologies developed under other premises than those of the police organization. Furthermore, there was a lack of management skills to handle these. The same goes for the implementation of new IT technologies, including phone systems, which were developed without the necessary skills to handle these technologies.

With focus on the changed organization, the current and previous situation has been disregarded. Therefor the implementation was made without understanding of the infor-
mal organization and its collective culture. Instead, it was based on a top-down process where feedback from the organization was neglected. The management's communication to the organization was directed towards individuals, rather than the collective that was new in the organizational culture. For example, the way of filling new positions came to mean an individual competition and rivalry, which challenged the previous collective principles for promotion.

In relation to the external environment, the police management did not realize the importance of and its influence on the discretion of the organization and the managerial space. This has resulted in loss of the organization's freedom of action and unfortunate consequences for both the managerial level and operational level.

All this has resulted in a lack in trust and frustration within the organization as well as in the outside environment.

FINLAND 2009–2010

The Finnish reforms were implemented during 2009 and 2010. The reform can be described as mainly administrative. Power was centralized. The Ministry of the Interior should be in charge of strategic planning and the National Police Board of police operational work. The national police units and the local police departments were reduced from 90 to 24 units. However, the police stations and resources on a local level were about the same.

Restructuring the Finnish Police Administration

The Finnish contribution in Fyfe et al. (2013), “Restructuring the Finnish Police Administration” is written by Kristina Haraholma and Jarmo Houtsonen. It is based on an evaluation made by Haraholma\(^2\) and ordered by the Police College of Finland.

The empirical basis consists of the police national result data system and surveys such as the police barometer and the police personnel barometer.

The article describes the background of the reform, which was based on influences from management theory such as New Public Management. In accordance with the rest of the public administration in Finland the reform should be guided by five aspects: security of a minimal service standard in the whole country, increasing productivity and profitability, management by results, maintaining cooperative relations with various partners and securing of the personnel’s motivation.

The relation between the ministry and the National Police Board was changed, police chiefs got new positions and at least formally a more strategic role. However, according to the authors the reform did not have any significant effect on police services at the local level. As opposed to other countries, the police work was carried out as before and no major changes in productivity of police work were observed.

\(^2\) Haraholma K. (2011). *Poliisin hallintorakenneuudistus: arviointitutkimus muutoksista ja sen vaikutuksista.* [Police management restructuring: An evaluation study of changes and its effects]. Poliisiammattikorkeakoulun raportteja 97. Tampere: Juvenes Print. The original report is not included here. After this reform, there have been others in Finland not found in non-Finnish texts.
But police officers were more critical of the reform. Experience of increased bureaucracy, inequality and dissatisfaction was reported especially from smaller stations. Measurements of citizens’ perception of the police had on the other hand not declined, but persisted at a high level. This was confirmed by Vuorensyrjä (2014), who from a survey reports that organizational stressors on labour turnover intention have been increasing in the Finnish police force during the police reform years.

SWEDEN 2015–

The implementation of the Swedish police reform started in 2015 with the purpose of creating higher quality, increased cost efficiency, increased flexibility and significantly improved results in police operations. The reform was preceded by a parliamentary commission that suggested an organizational change from 21 partly independent districts to one organization with one police chief directly subordinate to the government and with the overall responsibility for the entire police organization. An expert committee decided to rewrite the organizational map to seven new regions and about a hundred police districts. Furthermore, there should be six levels in the lines of command. Administration should be centralized to the central police authority and the regions.

The result of the reform has, as in the case of Denmark, been that the effects of the reform until spring 2017 can be described as an organization in crisis. There has for example been (from the time before the reform) a continuing decline in the percentage of solved crimes,3 and a loss in citizens’ confidence in the police.4 A survey from the Police Union from November 2015 states that three out of four of the police officers who responded do not believe that the current reorganization will improve police efficiency.5 Three publications have been published about the reform.

Swedish Police: The Piece of the Puzzle That Did Not Fit

Bo Wennström’s book (2014) “Svensk polis: pusselbiten som inte passade in” (Swedish Police: The Piece of the Puzzle That Did Not Fit) was published the year before the reform. He also summarizes his reasoning in Fyfe et al. (2013): Police Reform in Sweden: How to Make a Perfect Cup of Espresso.

Wennström’s book is based on interviews with, among others, former high police commissioners, government officials and ministers of justice. His focus is the processes behind the reform. From an institutional perspective, he analyses underlying motives for the reform, the parliamentary committee’s proposal and anticipated results of the reform.

One of Wennström’s conclusions is that the politicians abdicated their responsibility and left it to state officials to set the agenda for the reorganization of the police. This has led to a reform “blindly focused on organization and management” without an analysis of the

terms of policing. In particular, he stresses that the police mission requires discretion on the level of implementation

THE GREAT POLICE REFORM

Micael Björk's book (2016), *Den stora polisreformen, fem arbetspapper* [The Great Police Reform, Five Working Papers], consists of five “working papers” in which the introduction, first chapter and the conclusion deal directly with the reform, while the others on police culture, managerial work, status and applied sociology refer more to the police reform. It is based on field work from the year before the police reform started, together with organizational and police sociological literature.

Like Wennström above, he predicts that the reform will be a great failure, which seems to be a true divination so far. A consistent thesis in Björk's criticism of the reform is its emphasis on centralization and uniformity, which will mean standardization. As does Wennström, Björk claims that the emphasis on consistency will weaken the ability to manage a multifaceted reality. Instead of understanding the police in relation to its environment, the expert committee has been fixated on the internal organization.

Instead of standardization, a mission in a heterogeneous operating environment requires flexibility, differentiation, specialization and coordination. In addition, it must be based on the operative experiences of police officers. Rather than focusing on the boxes in an organization chart, the organizing committees ought to be focused on the arrows that connect them. Organizational conflicts cannot be organized away. They need to be handled through dialogue.

Evaluation from the Swedish Agency for Public Management

There is an ongoing evaluation carried out by Statskontoret (2016) [the Swedish Agency for Public Management] on behalf of the Government. This is one of three reports: *Ombildningen till en sammanhållen polismyndighet: delrapport 1 om genomförandearbetet* [Reorganisation to Form a Coherent Police Authority: Interim report 1 on the implementation process]. The next report will be published in autumn 2017, and the final report autumn 2018.

In this report, it is stated to be too early to assess the reform’s impact on the Police Authority’s operations. In this report, the focus lies “on how the reorganization has been implemented and whether the Police Authority has created the conditions that will allow the reform’s objectives to be achieved in the long term”.

The report is based on several sources: an overview of research on change processes in large reorganizations, interviews with 120 managers, mostly on regional and local levels, surveys carried out in autumn 2015 among police employees in the local police area, prosecutors and managers in the municipal social services. Furthermore, within the University of Gothenburg's SOM surveys, questions were asked about the public perception of police activities.

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Unlike Wennström and Björk’s analysis, the tone of this report to the government is diplomatic and with an understanding perspective. It notes that in certain respects, the reorganization has come as far as could be expected, but that several elements of the implementation process could have worked better. They state that steps have been taken to get closer to the general public as the introduction of local crime prevention efforts.

One concern from the evaluation is that it will be difficult to maintain efforts because municipal and area police are resources that can be used for other things. Local crime prevention efforts can be perceived as a paper product and therefore do not fulfill their function in the efforts to get closer to the citizens.

Central in the evaluation is that focus of the implementation has been on central management and on reinforcing the national structure with its emphasis on uniformity. This has led to a gap between what has been internally expected reform and the actual outcome. A central problem in this is that there have not been permanent managers in place on the local level. Furthermore, the work in the local police districts has not received sufficient priority. The continuous deterioration in the results of investigative operations should be rectified by reinforcing the investigative operations with resources and expertise, and developing and introducing new working practices.

Also, Haake, Rantatalo and Lindberg (2015) have made a study of police leaders during major organizational change pressures with 28 police leaders during 2014. They find that leadership at a policy level deviates from leadership in practice. This departs from the idea that police leaders will be agents of change promoting organizational reform. Instead, it is suggested that they represent a barrier to change initiatives.

**NORWAY 2016—**

The Norwegian police reform was implemented in 2016 and was described as a community policing reform. The purpose of the reform is reminiscent of those from the other Nordic countries. It was described as creating a community policing which is operative, visible and available and with the capacity and competence to prevent, investigate and prosecute criminal acts, and ensure the safety of citizens. Twenty-seven districts were reduced to 12 and there was a cut in the number of police stations from 339 to 121.

**Reforming the Norwegian Police between Structure and Culture**

In a working paper in English, Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja (2016) analyse the central public reports and documents leading to the police reform. These include the official inquiry report about the police response to the terrorist attacks of July 2011 (Report from the July 22 Commission8), the following inquiry report on reforming the police (The Police Analysis)9 and the resulting government proposal10 and parliamentary discussion which led to the decision for the police reform.

They conclude that while the inquiry after the massacre 22.7 2011 focuses on culture and leadership leading “to a potential cultural revolution which changed attitudes and police leadership”, the Police Analysis pointed to the need for structural reorganization by prescribing organizational mergers” (ibid., p. 25). The Police Analysis as well as the government’s final suggestions followed a structural/instrumental approach where hierarchy, centralization and standardization were central to create a robust police force. However, there was a discussion on how this centralization should go, where the Police Analysis suggested six regions while the government, after political compromises, indicated twelve, which was the final decision.

Police in Crisis. The Game of Norwegian Police after July 22, 2011


Johannesen’s book has major similarities with Wennström and Björk’s books above. With a basis in organizational theory, it is more analytical and provocative than empirical.

Like the Swedish critics, his focus is on the investigation that preceded the reform, “Politianalysen” [the Police Analysis] for its emphasis on central control, excessive uniformity and lack of links to the police operative reality. He also criticizes the report’s lack of a basis in scientific organizational knowledge and claims that the Police Analysis reminds most about an ideological manifesto for the police director, based on Taylorist management philosophy.

Police Employees and Managers’ Assessment

In a report by Renå (2016) police employees’ and managers’ attitudes to Norwegian police reform are presented: “Nærpolitireformen. Politiansatte og lederes vurdering av dagens situasjon og forventninger til reformen [The Community Police Reform: Police Employees and Managers’ Assessment of the Current Situation and Expectations of the Reform].

The survey was sent out in summer 2016 to all police employees and was answered by 36.8%. Eighty-six percent of the responses stated that reform would mean an increased centralization of resources; less than 20% stated that it would lead to more effective crime control, strengthening of crime prevention to children and youth, and a more visible and accessible police. Of the police personnel, only 8% believed that the reform would lead to higher visibility and accessibility, and 12% to more effective crime control.

The author concludes that the study strongly indicates that the political and administrative authorities have a job to do in gaining support for reform within the organization, and that the further process will be demanding.

A similar result is presented by the magazine of Norway’s police union Politiforum. 11

They report in a survey among their members (response rate 35%): 57% disagree with the statement that the reform would lead to “police being improved to prevent and combat crime” while nearly 75% disagree that the reform will ensure the presence of a “competent and efficient local neighborhood police”.

**Evaluation of the Community Police Reform Status Report 2016**

A parallel to the Swedish government-initiated report mentioned above is a status report from the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment who on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security have evaluated the Norwegian reform, Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT (Difi) (2017). *Evaluering av nærpolitireformen Statusrapport 2016* [Evaluation of the Community Policing Reform, Status Report 2016]. This is the first of three reports. A second report on culture, attitudes and management will be published in 2017, and an impact evaluation of whether the objectives of the reform have been achieved and an evaluation of the place of service structure will come out in 2019.

Sources for the report include Renå’s survey on attitudes to the reform mentioned above, national citizen surveys, and interviews with leading representatives of the police organization. There have also been carried out case studies of three police districts, including interviews with employees’ representatives from municipalities as well as central collaboration partners.

The report concludes that both the police employees and the municipalities have little confidence that the reform will be successful. It notes that the concept of community policing is problematic and that both the police employees and people in general perceive that the reform will lead to more centralization. The goals of the reform are perceived as over-ambitious and contradictory. In addition, there is considerable uncertainty that the necessary information resources and communications technology will be available.

**CONCLUSION**

Several themes recur in this literature overview. Except for the Finnish presentation, the authors are all critical as to what extent the reforms have or will fulfill their set goals.

All the reforms were presented as a form of decentralization through centralization in terms of releasing resources by larger administrative units. There has also been a belief in greater uniformity as a way of meeting organized crime, although most of the need for police work has direct causes on a local level. Nevertheless, this has meant a concentration of power over the police in the central organs and thereby politically controlled departments.

The reforms have been based on management theories, such as New Public Management, without regard to the particularity of police work. Knowledge and experience from police work as well as organizational cultural assumptions have been neglected. The same goes for local partners in police work.

The reforms have met resistance from a large part of the police officers, and often a loss of confidence in the police, at least on a local level.
REFERENCES


