Reflections on Community Policing and citizen participation

“The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.” (Arnstein, 1969:1)

Marleen Easton & Dominique Van Ryckeghem

Abstract:
Citizen participation, defined as a power issue, is a crucial constituent of democracies and has implications for policy-making in the security field. From this power perspective reflections are made on citizen participation within the field of policing in Belgium. We reflect on this issue by using the concept of citizen participation of Sherry Arnstein (1969) and by focusing on some practices developed in Belgium. We contextualize our findings from a historical perspective in which we pay attention to the influence of the traditional Belgian police model on the initiatives being observed.

Keywords: Civilian participation, democracy, community policing, Napoleonic police system, Anglo-saxon tradition.

1. Introduction

As in the governance of many other public organizations the participation of citizens is a key issue in the field of policing. Policing a democratic society implies that professionals dealing with security build up a relationship with the public within the context of the rule of law. This context influences the possibilities of citizen participation in relation to policing. In 2001, the Belgian police underwent a fundamental structural reform that created a genuine integrated police service structured on a federal (1 federal police) and local level (195 local police forces). The three former police forces, the municipal police, the Gendarmerie and the judicial police assigned to the offices of the public prosecutors gave way to an integrated police service. The main structural change is that the basis for police work is locally embedded and the power of the mayors, which are locally elected representatives, on that level has been strengthened. At the same time the philosophy of Community Policing has been introduced. It is an attempt to change the overall functioning of the police in relation to the public according to democratic principles such as

---

1 The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.

accountability and empowerment. From this respect the philosophy has in Belgium and abroad been promising in terms of creating citizen participation. Nevertheless, we observe that community policing became a container concept in which many different initiatives are being included. The nature of these initiatives usually reflects the particular history, roots and traditions of policing in the country being examined. In this contribution our aim is to gain insights into the limits of citizen participation in relation to community policing initiatives in Belgium. For that, we use the concept of citizen participation as a power issue, defined by Sherry Arnstein (1969). We take into account the historical roots and recent evolutions of the Belgian policing tradition to explore the possibilities in terms of ‘real’ citizen participation.

This article is divided into three parts. In the first part, we present the definition of citizen participation which we shall use to examine the initiatives being developed within the context of community policing in Belgium. We rely on the work of Sherry Arnstein, who is considered to be an important point of reference on this issue since the 1960s. In the second part, we reflect upon some of the initiatives being developed under the umbrella called ‘Community Oriented Policing’4 in Belgium and we come to the conclusion that it can be considered to be a container concept which consists of diverse initiatives which are labelled as Community Policing or are in one way or another related to the participation of citizens. We try to give an overview of the main categories that can be distinguished without being exhaustive. Finally we reflect on the roots of Community Policing and the traditions of our Belgian police system in which it has been introduced. This explains forms and appearances of Community Oriented Policing in our country and generates discussion on citizen participation in the context of democratic policing.

2. Defining citizen participation

In the development of our argument we use the concept of ‘citizen participation’ as defined by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. Arnstein was active in Washington and Chicago in the sector of housing and urban planning. She designed guidelines to involve residents in the policy cycle of cities from
planning to implementation. Her most famous article ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ has been the reference for the design of many participation ladders (Arnstein, 1969; Edelenbos & Monnikhof, 2001; Wauters & Dezeure, 2012). Central to these participation ladders are the gradual steps from ‘to inform’, ‘to consult’, ‘to offer advice’, ‘to co-produce’ or ‘to co-decide’, that latter of which is the highest level of active citizen participation. These steps have previously been used for the evaluation of the impact of the British National Reassurance Policing Programme in which community engagement, visibility and familiarity are being studied (Tuffin et al., 2006: 63-76).

According to Arnstein’s original definition “Citizen participation is a categorial term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.”(Arnstein, 1969:2). Important parts in this definition are ‘power’ and ‘have nots’. Citizen participation is therefore explicitly related to the power balance between citizens and the state.

Central on her original participation ladder are ‘nonparticipation’ (including manipulation and therapy), ‘tokenism’ (including informing, consultation and placation) and ‘citizen power’ (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) (Arnstein, 1969). ‘Manipulation’ and ‘therapy’ refers to the objective not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to “educate” or “cure” the participants. ‘Informing’, ‘consulting’ and ‘placation’ allows citizens to hear and to have a voice but under these conditions, according to Arnstein, they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. There is no assurance of changing the status quo. ‘Placation’ allows the have-nots to advise but the powerholders retain the right to decide. Further up the ladder ‘partnership’ allows citizens to

---

5 For more information see Model Cities Program in Chicago on http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/832.html
6 Tokenism refers to actions that are intended to make people think that an organization deals fairly with people or problems, when in fact it does not (http://www.ldoceonline.com/).
7 Placation is the act of placating and overcoming distrust and animosity. Placate means ‘gain the good will of’.
negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. Finally, ‘delegated power’ and ‘citizen control’ are at the top of the ladder as citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats or full managerial power (Arnstein, 1969). Although Arnstein recognizes the simplification that is inherent to her participation ladder, it illustrates her point that so many have missed the significant gradations of citizen participation.

The critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process, is reflected in the French student poster mentioned below (Arnstein, 1969). It refers to the process in which those who have power claim that everyone's opinion is taken into consideration while only a few actually take advantage of the benefits.

The fundamental argument that Arnstein is pointing at is the fact that participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless (Arnstein, 1969).

For two main reasons Arnstein offers an interesting perspective to have a look at the degree of citizen participation in the functioning of the Belgian police today. Firstly, by pointing out significant gradations of citizen participation her concepts make it possible to shed another light on the many initiatives being taken under the heading of community policing. Secondly, her concepts make us pay attention to certain pitfalls and paradoxes in terms of democracy which are related to citizen participation. The participation paradox, the professionalization paradox, and questions about what citizens themselves really want, are the main pitfalls related to the concept of citizen participation as conceptualized by Sherry Arnstein. We explain each of those below.

8 In English, “I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate… they profit”.
The participation paradox refers to the gap that exists between those who participate and those who do not and who are excluded from the process of participation. This paradox tends to occur quite often in relation to citizens who do not have the possibility or ability to participate in certain structures that are being presented (Gomis, 1999). The reasons can be diverse and are interrelated. These are a lack of communication skills, lack of information or sometimes pure lack of interest. Moreover this ability is often culturally determined because means of participation are culturally ‘coloured’ and generate exclusion in this way (Creighton, 2005). This raises questions about representation, a core element of democracy.

The professionalization paradox refers to the process in which the solution of societal problems is assigned to professionals. This generates an inability of citizens to address these problems themselves (Vos & Van Doorn, 2004). People unlearn to take care of themselves in a world full of professionals who are supposed to take care of them. The last pitfall is related to what citizens themselves really want, what they expect from participation and the question if professionals are able to capture those needs. It raises the question of whether professionals are oriented towards, and succeed in dealing with, problems as they are perceived and experienced by the public they serve. It is a demand for a more qualitative and adjusted service that fits every public service a democracy provides.

Taking into account the characteristics and possible pitfalls related to citizen participation as defined by Arnstein, let’s have a closer look at practices developed in Belgium within the context of the introduction of community policing.

3. Practices in Belgium referring to citizen participation

In this part, we use the concepts of Sherry Arnstein to reflect upon some of the initiatives being developed during the ongoing introduction of the philosophy of ‘Community Policing’ in Belgium. Overall it is impressive to see how many initiatives have been developed and how often citizen participation is mentioned in relation to different kinds of initiatives and processes. We try to give an overview of the main categories that can be distinguished without being exhaustive.9

---

9 A study of all the best practices of community policing gathered by the Federal Police would take us too far in the course of this article, see www.infozone.be. An interesting overview is the Manual of Common Elements and Good Practice in Community Policing in the European Union. This project was funded by the
Roughly three main categories of initiatives which we call ‘civilianization’, ‘civilians for the police’ and ‘policing by civilians’ can be distinguished. In what follows we go into each of these categories with attention for the true meaning of the categories on the basis of some examples.

3.1 Civilianization

The first category consists of references to the use of civilians within the public police organization. Opening up the organization to non-cops is worldwide spread and been regarded as the participation of citizens within the public police. It consists mainly of support for diverse tasks by citizens whether or not on payroll (Aebi et al., 2006; Cox, 1996; Jones et al., 1994). The most obvious examples are criminologists being recruited to support the police in the analysis of crime statistics and social workers supporting the social unit of local police precincts. In extremis the volunteers working for the police are considered to be an example although this practice is not significantly developed in Belgium.

It is especially the use of civilian employees within the Belgian public police that has recently increased. More civilians have been recruited in the federal (since 2003) and local (since 2006) component of the Integrated Police Force to execute administrative and logistic tasks (Dupuis, 2008). In 2007 nearly 18% of IPF employees were in civilian roles - 8537 civilians to 47526 policemen/women, roughly a ratio of 1:5.6 (Bruggeman et al., 2009: 34-35). There are different motives for this evolution such as more policemen/women on the beat, budget cuts, bringing in expertise and stimulating diversity within the police organization (Vandevoorde et al, 2003; Verstrynge et al., 2010).

When we have a closer look at what this category exactly means it becomes clear that it has nothing to do with citizen participation as defined above. Civilians in such administrative roles do not play any role in expressing citizens’ sentiments and concerns. As they do not shape police

European Commission (AGIS/2004/062). Work on producing the manual was carried out under the four EU Presidencies of Ireland, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Manuel can be downloaded through the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/funding/projects/docs/AGIS2004062.doc

10 A practice which is more common in the Netherlands for example see Smeets et al., 2011.
11 Royal Decree of 5 September 2001 on the minimal norm of deployed administrative and logistic personnel in the Local Police (KB 5 September 2001).
policy and practice, their presence is not at all related to changing the power balance between citizens and the government but to integrate civilians within the police organization. Rather this category could be labeled as ‘civilianization’ of the police instead of citizen participation.

3.2 Civilians for the police

The second category contains initiatives in which civilians are being involved in the policy cycle of the security domain and are considered to be one actor in the security chain. The question arises what the nature is of the involvement of citizens in the different phases of the policy cycle (preparation, formulation, implementation and evaluation). This category fits into a European trend of organizing national and local plans and/or consultation processes in the form of surveys and networks of partners (Bradford et al., 2009).

It is important to note that the Belgian police policy cycle is anchored in the law of 1998 on the Integrated Police, structured on two levels (1 federal police and 195 local police forces). This cycle takes four years to complete, follows the Legislature (4 years) and is mainly steered by one national and 195 zonal security plans. The policy cycle is steered by an inter-ministerial circular and guidelines to prepare the security plans. Furthermore since 2007, the federal government has been concluding 4-yearly strategic security and prevention plans with the Belgian municipalities, in which the municipality is required to take a controlling role. The policy choices and priorities are motivated by a local security diagnostic tool (Willekens, 2005). This tool has the ambition to methodologically support cities and towns in offering them a picture of local crime and insecurity.

In preparing these plans and policies a lot of efforts are being made to get a grip on what civilians expect from the government/police and how they feel about their security and quality of life. In what follows we consider some of the flagship initiatives in this category.

---

12 Article 4 and 7 of the Law on the Integrated Police foresees the preparation of a national Security Plan and article 35, 36 and 37 provides the making of zonal security plans.
13 Inter-ministerial Directive PLP 44, 16/07/2008 (PLP 44) and Guidelines to prepare the zonal security plan 2009-2012 (Directie van de relaties met de lokale politie, CGL, 2007).
The latest results of the Security Monitor\textsuperscript{14} in Belgium, in which public attitudes and expectations are regularly measured, show that 30\% of the citizens had contact with the police. This contact was not in the context of being a victim but rather to report a crime, being controlled by the police or in the context of administrative actions. 57\% were satisfied with the presence of the police in the street and 55\% were satisfied on the information being provided by the police. A remarkable finding in relation to community policing is that more than half of the respondents do not know the policemen/women who are responsible for their neighborhood. 35\% of the interviewees would however like to have more contact with him/her. These findings indicate that there is room for improvement on the level of information and service delivery from the police towards the citizens. It is clear that the public do have expectations in relation to the police. Furthermore, recent Belgian research on this subject indicates that despite the huge diversity within the contemporary Belgian society the average expectation of citizens about the police is quite similar. Almost everyone wants a friendly and helpful police. Regardless of their ethnicity, people want to have a police who is there for them and who is accessible. The police has to be aware of (even small) problems and has to be known to them (or ‘visible’) (Easton & Ponsaers, 2010; Easton et al., 2009). However a local tool, or a longitudinal survey on what citizens really want from the police, and how it evolves over time, is not available yet. With some adjustments, the safety monitor would be able to give an answer to these questions (Van Altert et al., 2009; Verwee & Ponsaers, 2011).

Besides the collection of these quantitative data, endeavors are undertaken to collect qualitative information on this topic. The general report on insecurity of the King Baudouin Foundation in 2006 is worth mentioning. The report was published after a two year process of listening to (groups of) citizens in relation to different issues. The aim was to generate creative ideas on how to deal with security problems that were encountered (Albers et al., 2006). Here citizens are participating in the process of problem-solving in order to ameliorate the security policy process.

\textsuperscript{14} The Security Monitor started in 1998 and is a large-scale telephone survey of the Belgian population about the safety of citizens and functioning of the police. The data collection under consideration here was realized by the market research company GfK SIGNIFICANT and the survey targeted all residents of Belgium of 15 years or older. For this purpose, 37,000 telephone interviews were conducted between December 2008 and July 2009. For more see http://www.polfed-fedpol.be/pub/veiligheidsMonitor/2008_2009/monitor2008_2009_nl.php
Besides governmental and academic initiatives (Van den Herrewegen, 2010) to get a grip on what the Belgian population thinks about the safety of citizens and the functioning of the police, there is a lot of interest in measuring the safety problems of local entities by the police in order to develop the zonal security plans mentioned above\textsuperscript{15}. The introduction of these plans has generated a wide variety of efforts to take into account the perspectives of the population. In Belgium the security scan has been promoted (and used by many local police forces) to map the expectations of local citizens in relation to security and quality of life (Van Craen & Ackaert, 2006). It has been one of the means to develop a local security policy which takes into account the concerns of the local community. The police collect information from citizens to be used within the preparation and formulation phase of the policy cycle and the citizens get a chance to signal certain crimes or disorders to be addressed by the police.

The methodology of the World Café is worthwhile mentioning in this category (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). In line with this concept Police Cafés have been organized in Belgium and approximately 10\% of the 195 local police zones were involved. The idea behind this Café is to develop knowledge through the organization of a meeting (in the format of an informal café) where citizens (often key figures in a neighborhood) can communicate with each other about their concerns in relation to security and their quality of life. The aim is to contribute to a better solution of problems through a better understanding what may lead to more effective interventions in the field of security. This initiative is considered innovative but still in its infancy (Van Aerschot, 2008). Once again the police is collecting information from citizens to be used within the preparation and formulation phase of the policy cycle. Citizens are also asked to give advice in relation to the solving of specific problems related to security and the quality of life in their neighborhood.

Belgian police leaders are very much aware of the fact that citizens are a key partner in the security policy process\textsuperscript{16}. Putteman, D’Haese & De Becker stress that not only in the phase of preparation and formulation citizens should participate but also in the phase of the implementation of security policies. It is then that they can fully play their role as partners. In his hometown Dendermonde, Putteman (2011) developed local initiatives in the field of domestic

\textsuperscript{15} Since 2004 local police forces in Belgium need to develop a zonal security plan which has to be approved by the ministry of Internal and Judicial Affairs (PLP 35, 07/05/2004).

\textsuperscript{16} Discussions on these topics were held during a conference on citizen participation organized by the Flemish Centre for Police Studies on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of May 2011. For more see www.politiestudies.be
violence, the use of drugs by youngsters, drug dealing in schools, and the use of violence. The social sector, neighborhood committees and problem-related target groups are invited to collaborate in common strategies. Citizens were involved as one of the security actors. Noteworthy is that self-reliance is being stimulated in these projects. This transcends the former initiatives. These prototypes generated critical questions about this process of participation, but also the suggestion to proceed with pilot projects in order to explore the strengths and weaknesses of such processes in more depth. Privacy issues and professional secrecy are only a few topics that deserve further attention. D’haese and De Becker (2011) came to the same conclusion during an experiment in which the police, the city and the university worked together in order to deal with local security problems related to the university city of Leuven. They have succeeded in developing collaboration between these actors in which students play a crucial role in the surveillance of fellow students and the selection of the police priorities being addressed.

To conclude, in describing the initiatives above it becomes clear that most of the work in this category has been done in the field of preparation and formulation of security policies. Citizens are asked to participate in surveys, qualitative interviewing, police cafés or as a key figure in roundtables or focus groups to inform and/or offer advice to the police on local community matters. This information is then handed over to the local neighborhood police officer(s). Although here and there pilot projects are being developed in relation to the implementation of policies, true partnerships in this respect are still to be further developed. As far as the participation of citizens in the evaluation of security policies is concerned, it seems to be largely underdeveloped.

In terms of Arnstein’s ladder of participation these initiatives are largely limited to the level of informing, consulting and (experimenting with) partnerships. The questions remain whether the collected quantitative and qualitative data (Monitor, scan’s etc.) is truly reflecting what citizens want. Furthermore the initiatives towards partnership with citizens are confronted with the participation paradox. Those members of the community who are willing and/or able to participate are a selection and do not represent all community interests. We should be aware of the pitfall of exclusion wherever citizens pretend to be a voice for others, especially in the field of security. Previous research has indicated that hard-to-reach groups such as young people being

---

17 A conclusion that is being supported by the main conclusion in the European Manual mentioned above.
homeless and/or school excluded, are overlooked when it comes to this kind of consultation (Crawford, 1997; Pain et al., 2002; Newburn & Jones, 2002).

3.3 Policing by civilians

The third category contains the initiatives taken by citizens themselves which are related to policing. Here we talk about citizens or community networks of social control which rise bottom-up and which do not have anything to do with the organized public police as we know it. It is about actions of citizens before, during or after (criminal) offenses. This can have both a preventive and/or a repressive nature and refers to activities such as trying to influence the behavior of others, technical protection of property, commenting misconduct of others, restorative actions, reprisals, and self-defense (Denkers et al., 2001, Boutellier, 2011). Militias are the most extreme form in this category.

In relation to community policing the booming of ‘citizens information networks’ in the early nineties in Belgium is interesting. We observe citizen initiatives which in the beginning mainly included (preventive) watchfulness in relation to specific local security problems such as a plague of burglary or theft but a diversity of initiatives have developed ever since. These initiatives are a ‘translation’ of the ‘neighborhood watch’ initiatives in the UK (Rosenbaum, 1987, Bennett, 1990). Since the nineties the government tried to regulate these initiatives through legislation.\(^{18}\) Important to note is the question of setting up such a network must come from the population. The citizens take an initiative and each citizen should be able to participate in these networks.

Now and then we observe more repressive initiatives from citizens in relation to local security issues. In the summer of 2011 a local newspaper headed “Although the police officially maintains a zero tolerance in the Antwerp district Seefhoek, drug dealers can in practice do what they want. Local residents are so fed up that they take the law into their own hands.”\(^{19}\) It was clear that the residents were not satisfied with the actions of the government and the police and wanted to take action themselves. It soon became clear that “Playing police”, as one official called it, was not

---

\(^{18}\) The latest Directive from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (UK: the Home secretary) on these networks dates from 2010 (BIN/PLP 2010).

\(^{19}\) http://www.demorgen.be 12/08/11.
approved by the local politicians. The question remained what the government could do with this strong signal of discontent of the local residents.

There is no doubt that these initiatives touch the true meaning of citizen participation according to Arnstein. Both examples can be situated on the level of ‘citizen power’ which includes partnership, delegated power and citizen control. While the ‘citizens information networks’ are mainly limited to partnership, the militias imply delegated power and true citizen control. Policing by civilians, and militias in particular, is confronted with the paradox of participation. The question remains “who is going to take initiative to ‘play police’ against who?” Although some of these initiatives by civilians can expect much understanding, the door is opened toward misuses and the ‘rule of the strongest’ or even the ‘law of the jungle’.

Article one of the Belgian law on private militias voted in 1936 explicitly prohibits any private militia or agency of private individuals whose goal is to use force or replace the army or police. This legal context influenced the presence (and perception) of militias in Belgium through the years and puts some limits on possible future evolutions of this category. At the same time militias show that the participation paradox may involve not only a question of who is in and who is out in policing, but also what people do and how they use participation. The use of (physical) force and the political negotiations about whom and what groups will have access to are important here. It shows that the issue of citizen participation in matters of security and policing can only be fully assessed by taking into account this dimension.

4. Reflections in relation to policing traditions, new models of democratic policing and community relations

The analysis presented above leads us to conclude that many initiatives have been taken to involve citizens in the field of security since the introduction of the concept of Community Oriented Policing (COP) in Belgium. The three distinct categories (civilianization, civilians for the police and policing by civilians) reflect important types of citizen participation, as defined by Arnstein. Citizen participation comes in different shades of grey. The question arises how we can reflect on these shades in view of future developments in this area. To do so we first cast a glance at the roots of the Belgian police system and its inherent limits. Then the outline of future
developments of citizen participation in Belgium is discussed in relation to evolutions abroad. This brings us to the main argument of our contribution.

The roots of the Belgian police system lies in France where the establishment of the police coincided with the revolution of 1789, dedicated to the great ideals of equality, freedom and brotherhood. The new state and its institutions, that were to bring these ideals into practice, were permanently secured. The republic followed a double track for this with the military defense to protect the state against external enemies and civil defense (national police and gendarmerie) against the internal enemy. Both were directly controlled by the central political power. It is called the Napoleonic tradition. In Belgium this heritage gave way to a national, centralized police system, controlled by the state. The gendarmerie in Belgium was conceptualized as ‘an instrument of the state’, in addition to the army and in order to protect the state from internal enemies (Van Ryckeghem et al., 2001). The decentralized local municipal police forces that were accountable to the local mayors have always been an important counterpart for the centralized nature of the Belgian police system. Starting from this Napoleonic tradition citizen participation can only be perceived from an instrumental point of view. In terms of the participation ladder, it means that citizens can be no more than ‘informants’ for the police. Furthermore this tradition has produced self-sufficient types of organizations (army as well as national police/gendarmerie) which succeeded in needing nothing or nobody from outside in terms of education, technology or medical care.

Contrary to the French and by extension the so-called Latin experience, England has long resisted the introduction of a professional police force. Its people and its political representatives maligned the French police model that was considered as an instrument of a despotic political power. According to the ancient traditions of independence and freedom of local communities; Sir Robert Peel and the first commissioners of the City of London created the image of a consensual British police which would act only upon approval of the local population and would be organized locally. The following quote expresses this strategy and image: “Police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give fulltime attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the
interest of community welfare and existence” (Sir Robert Peel, 182920). The quote is important in terms of citizen participation as it assumes that the relationship between citizens and police comes natural, because of the local organization (close to the people and part of society) and the political independence of the police.

Although there have been some evolutions towards more centralization and coordination within the Anglo-Saxon system, it stresses the ‘locally and relatively independent’ character of each and every police service. The Napoleonic system however generates a police force that is national, centralized and controlled by the state. Previous research has shown that the articulation of community policing differs depending on the implicit relationship between the state and the citizen that goes along with these systems (Brogden & Nijhar, 2005). In some way Belgium has tried to take the best of both worlds as it has gradually integrated Anglo-saxon elements within its French heritage (Bruggeman et al., 2010). In particular during the reform in 1998 deconcentration and decentralisation have been leading principles. As mentioned in our introduction the main structural change is that the basis for police work is locally embedded and the power of the mayors, which are locally elected representatives, on that level has been strengthened21. At the same time the philosophy of Community Policing has been introduced in an attempt to change the overall functioning of the police in relation to the public according to democratic principles such as partnership, accountability and empowerment. Although precisely these elements have created an opening for more citizen participation they also generated inconsistencies in the relationship between the population and the police due to conflicting policing traditions. Our main argument is that these conflicting traditions set the boundaries in Belgium for future evolutions in terms of citizen participation and community policing. In what follows we illustrate our argument in relation to the above described categories of citizen participation (civilianization, civilians for the police, policing by civilians).

Although power balances as defined in Arnstein’s participation ladder are not changed through the process of civilianization, the presence of citizens within the police organization reflects an important evolution in our Belgian policing tradition. Bringing civilians in to the police organization refers to an increased interaction with the outside world in an attempt to open up

21 It has to be noticed that the reform in 1998 implied an integration of the judicial police forces into the federal component of the integrated police.
traditionally closed systems. This goes hand in hand with possibilities of cultural change within those systems (Jones, Newburn & Smith, 1994). The implementation of community oriented policing in Belgium with its accent on ‘external orientation’ opens up possibilities of more ‘civilianization’ in the future.

As far as the initiatives are concerned which we have labeled ‘civilians for the police’, a lot of efforts have been done in the field of Belgian policing to involve citizens within the security policy cycle. There are several underlying reasons varying from gaining access to information, providing information, consulting citizens for more sustained decisions and improvement of policy cycles that are inherent to every public organization. The implementation of Community Policing has opened up new possibilities in this respect, as illustrated above. Nevertheless, it is important to push these efforts beyond the limit of the instrumental approach (public informing the police). The strengthening of the local autonomy and power of the mayor over the local police in Belgium is an important lever to initiate further innovations in this category.

In some way these efforts can be considered a means to sign for the basic Anglo-saxon idea of reassurance policing, as conceptualized by Martin Innes. Reassurance policing “involves local communities in identifying priority crime and disorder issues in their neighborhood which they then tackle together with the police and other public services and partners” (Morris, Home Office, 2006:1 ; Tuffin et al., 2006:63). Crucial is that the community identifies the signal crimes and disorder. The aim is to produce disproportionate impacts in terms of improving public confidence, reducing fear and thus inducing a sense of reassurance (Innes & Fielding, 2002). Here too the participation paradox is a pitfall. Whose concerns are going to be considered as priorities? Questions arise on the nature of this policing model and the transferability to Belgium (Ponsaers & Easton, 2008).

As this model is developed within the context of severe terrorism threats in the UK and from a mainly geographical notion of security linked to neighbourhood policing, it is not that obvious to develop similar practices in Belgium. The Belgian interpretation of community policing is far more oriented towards problem-solving and communities which transcend the geographical boundary of a neighborhood such as people who use facilities in cities but live elsewhere or (inter) national virtual communities who have a local foothold (Bovenkerk et al., 2010).
How to measure the needs and expectations of these changing communities is a current challenge in climbing up Arnstein’s participation ladder and moving towards more citizen participation in the context of policing. Furthermore it is clear that the key to success lies beyond the phase of informing, in using the input of citizens as ‘advice’ or stepping stone towards ‘coproduction’ within the policy process. This implies one step forward on Arnstein’s participation ladder and it means that citizens are considered to be true partners in the policy process.

The evolution towards ‘policing by civilians’ can be associated with the trend recently being described as *plural policing*. Plural policing refers to different actors (such as the army, private security companies, other regulatory authorities, volunteers and citizens) being involved in policing. Crucial in this process is the changing power balance between government, the public police and these other security actors (Bayley & Shearing, 2005; Crawford et al., 2005; Jones & Newburn, 2006). Although the modernity of the concept of plural policing has been relativized (Zedner, 2006), in relation to citizen participation it is a challenge for each nation state. It touches the power relation between citizens and the state, which is rooted in the national police traditions. It brings up the discussion about the role the state can play for citizens who want to take initiative or want to be responsible for their own security. As a result, the manifestations of citizen participation in this category are highly influenced by the legal context of each country. This is illustrated above in relation to the Belgian legislation on ‘citizen information networks’ and private militias.

We believe that the Belgian experience in relation to citizen participation is very interesting. It illustrates how, with respect for Belgian traditions, a compromise is sought between instrumentality and local accountability. In dealing with these tensions in the future Monjardets (1996) point of view could be helpful. He refers to the different roles of police. These are the police as an instrument of power in the hands of the state, the police as delivering service to citizens and the police as a professional group with its own interests. Citizen participation implies that the second role, the ‘service delivery to the public’ is further developed. A process in which the legal boundaries and the limits set by the instrumental role (but from a local accountability point of view) have to be taken into account (Van Ryckeghem & Hendrickx, 2009).

In conclusion the conceptual framework of Arnstein has been useful to make some reflections on community policing and citizen participation in Belgium. From a democratic point of view it is
clear that there is still some considerable progress to make in terms of her participation ladder and that Belgium can do it by taking into account the ‘blend’ between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The final question remains whether this topic will be on the agenda of our local mayors and our newly appointed Minister of Internal Affairs (Home Office). As elected representatives of the Belgian population they have to deal with fostering this context in which citizens, institutions and professionals can take up responsibilities in tackling contemporary security issues.

5. References


CP1 = Ministerial Directive on Community Policing, holding the Belgian interpretation of the concept and the application on the integrated police force, structured on two levels, 27th of May 2003.

CP2 = Ministerial Directive on the promotion of organisational development of the local police in order to implement community policing, 3th of November 2004.


PLP 35 Ministeriële omzendbrief (Ministerial Directive) van 7 mei 2004 betreffende de procedure tot indiening van de zonale veiligheidsplannen en de goedkeuring ervan door de Ministers van Binnenlandse Zaken en Justitie.


Van de Sompel, R. & Ponsaers, P., De pijlers van de gemeenschapsgerichte politiezorg in België, pp. 66. (See: http://www.info-zone.be/)


