

**PUBLIC SAFETY CENTRES
IN THE NETHERLANDS¹**

A CASE STUDY

Key Topics Discussed:

CO-OPERATION, NETWORKS AND WORKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

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INTRODUCTION

Unheard of a decade ago, Public Safety Centres (PSCs) are a recent and relatively unknown phenomenon within the Dutch public sector. While the first was formed in 2002, there are now 47 PSCs across the Netherlands, with most having emerged over the past two years. This study aspires to shed some light on the processes relating to the PSCs and how they have come to be viewed as an effective tool in dealing with complex challenges relating to public safety.

Dutch public sector work has long been characterized by a propensity to specialize. While this process has enabled public organizations to attain advanced levels of knowledge and skill, it has also become difficult to co-ordinate efforts in an effective way. This lack of co-ordination is perhaps particularly true in the area of “social safety,” which involves multiple and disparate challenges. In trying to reduce crime and public nuisance, problems frequently prove to be too complicated and multifaceted for single approaches to be effective. Providing public safety is a complex task as related challenges are constantly changing and problems are in constant motion. Against this background, the PSCs represent an approach to overcoming compartmentalization, to co-ordinating individual efforts effectively and to stimulating co-operation in the pursuit of public safety.

PSCs are networks of organizations formed to stimulate co-operative approaches in dealing with crime and public nuisance and, hence, share office space. Each network is comprised of public and private organizations working in some area of public safety, organized to deal with cases referred to them by the contributing partners. Once a case has been reviewed and action agreed upon, representatives from partner organizations communicate the agreements back to their own organizations for implementation. Because of their inclusive approach, PSCs are seen to be of great value in supporting the government’s mission to increase safety in Dutch urban areas. Operating under the principles of short communication lines, integrated approaches, co-operation, effectiveness, efficiency and balancing punitive measures with prevention, PSCs are (on paper) well suited to dealing with the complex issue of social safety.

In the following pages, we elaborate on how the PSCs—by connecting national policy and local realities—are expected to strengthen the anticipative capacity of the Dutch public sector in dealing with safety. After exploring the development of PSCs, we turn to the processes of identifying, interpreting and dealing with problems. In the last section, we point to a number of existing tensions and considerations that ought to be taken into account when attempting to connect local-level practice with policy.

POLICY CONTEXT

Over the past decade, as part of a broader emphasis on public safety and security, social safety has gained prominence in Dutch public debate and climbed high on the political and policy agenda. In 2007, the government presented a general policy program outlining 74 targets spread over six themes,² which the Balkenende IV Cabinet³ aspired to achieve by the end of its mandate in 2011.⁴ Within the public safety and security theme, 15 targets were mentioned, one of which states that the government will establish PSCs in larger cities.⁵ The general policy program also included ten more specific programs, one being “Safety Begins with Prevention,” which deals in part with the creation of PSCs.⁶ The new policy broadened the concept of public safety and security and aimed to complement punitive measures with prevention.

The overall goals of the Dutch safety program are to reduce crime and public nuisance by 25 percent and recidivism by 10 percent by 2011, compared to 2002 levels. These goals, inherited from an earlier program and policy framework,⁷ along with measures to monitor performance, are the result of the wide-ranging decentralization of Dutch public sector activities. The process of devolving responsibility for public safety and security to local authorities was intensified in 1997, with the introduction of the Justice in the Vicinity (*Justitie in de buurt*) policy framework. Initially focused on problem-ridden neighbourhoods in four Dutch cities, the purpose of the framework was to better connect Ministry of Justice activities with local authorities (including the police), thereby shortening communication lines. The framework was further developed and broadened, leading to the introduction of Justice in the Vicinity—New Style in 2004.

It is worthwhile to elaborate briefly on the current ethos of broadening approaches to complex problems, as this is relevant to how the PSCs function. The “Safety Begins with Prevention” program involves six ministries,⁸ and represents one part of the government’s efforts to stimulate integrated approaches based on multiple perspectives. A key feature of this program (explained later in more detail) is also a characteristic of the PSCs: a carefully mixed blend of law enforcement, preventive measures and post-incarceration after-care. To create this blend, ingredients are sourced from both the public and the private sectors, including agencies connected to various ministries, housing corporations, civic organizations and organizations providing care and education.

“DISCOVERY” OF A TOOL

The first PSC was created in the City of Tilburg in 2002 through the initiative of the local Public Prosecution Service. Although safety organizations had co-operated before, there was room for improvement. At the time, the local head of police, the senior public prosecution officer and the mayor of Tilburg were concerned about the lack of safety in the city. They reasoned that by sitting together in one building, the various actors involved in safety-related activities could better connect their processes, the collaboration would have a positive effect on the level of safety in the city and communication lines would be shorter. With the support of these three senior public servants (representing the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Justice and the municipal government), nine organizations were invited to participate in the new collaborative venture. During the first three or four years of its existence, the PSC focused primarily on processes related to criminal law.

In 2002, the Municipality of Tilburg commissioned a local criminology professor to conduct a comprehensive study on the state of public safety in the city: it painted a very grim picture.⁹ The report states that residents of the municipality experienced unacceptably high levels of crime and public nuisance, and generally felt unsafe. The study portrays the PSC as a fundamental building block and concludes that its position had to be strengthened if the city were to increase social safety. In addition, the study recommends that the municipality take on a coordinating and more proactive role in providing social safety. According to the manager at the local PSC, the

municipal government fully adopted the recommendations and was to implement them within four years.

An evaluation performed at the end of this period concludes that the work at the PSC was a great success, as the overall picture of public safety had improved. Among the oft-quoted improvements were a reduction in recidivism among young people of approximately 50 percent, a lower number of first-time offenders and a general decrease in crime in the public sphere.¹⁰ If such good co-operation could be achieved within the sphere of the penal system, it was reasoned, Why not extend this approach to organizations in the mental health care sector?

What took place in the Tilburg PSC was not an isolated case—it matched a general trend in the Netherlands of pursuing an integrated approach to addressing the complex issue of public safety. Nevertheless, the Tilburg PSC gained national attention and was visited by politicians, municipal governments and senior public servants. This profile was due in part to a local scholar who enthusiastically propagated the importance of the PSC in improving public safety. As a result, the Minister of Justice, with his strong connections to Tilburg, ensured that the PSC concept was incorporated into the national general policy program.

In Tilburg, the government had found a tool that supported the policy framework, appeared suitable for dealing with the complex challenge of increasing public safety and, through a number of key actors, was adopted as part of a national program. In its initial form, the PSC was not a ready-made tool that could be adopted at the national level. Rather, it had developed through continual contact with high-ranking public servants active beyond the local context.

DEVELOPING NATIONAL COVERAGE

The Tilburg PSC has been held forth as a prime example of how a co-operative and integrated approach to safety can contribute to the achievement of the government’s goals. This locally conceived experiment, built on popular concepts found in national policy frameworks, fit the zeitgeist of Dutch public sector activities. With the support of some key actors, the national government included the expansion of PSCs in its general policy

program, and they are now found in all larger cities in the Netherlands. With only a handful of PSCs operating in 2007, 47 are now spread across the country, and the Balkenende IV Cabinet reached its target of creating a nationwide network.

There has been great enthusiasm for the PSCs overall; however, the varying degrees of support, commitment and resources found in each locality may influence the level of success. The manager in Tilburg, who took part in creating the first PSC, strongly emphasizes that, “*people* are the most important factors in creating a success or a failure.” He offers a word of caution regarding the development of new PSCs:

What I tell people is “I’ll tell you my story—how we did it here—and you take whatever suits you best. But you have to take your own little steps. You can’t start with 20 organizations at once. In every city, in every village, people already co-operate. Sometimes it’s just a couple of people, sometimes three, sometimes five. Start with that as your basis. [...] Really, you’ve got to start on a small scale. Keep it simple, and slowly build from below. Don’t make it too complicated at once; let it develop. And another thing that you have to count on is that it takes time. You’ve got to deal with different organizations, all with their own culture.”

Given that historical background and the drivers that led to the expansion of the model, it is time to explore how the PSCs work on a day-to-day basis.

OUTLINE OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY CENTRES IN PRACTICE

The most basic feature of a PSC is the co-operation of representatives from several organizations concerned with some aspect of public safety, all working together at one location. Although managers tend to be keen on sketching an organizational chart for the PSCs, one of the intentions of co-operation is the adaptive nature of the network, where partners are engaged on an as-needed basis. It is often suggested that a PSC is not an

organization, but rather a platform for co-operation, manifested in the physical location shared by individual participants. One of its fundamental principles is a network-like and non-hierarchical structure where representatives of participating organizations remain employed by their parent organizations, but are present at the PSC on an assignment basis.

The PSCs’ main task is to contribute to reducing crime and public nuisance. According to the directives, PSCs are to contribute to increasing safety by facilitating co-operation. This is not a flaw. These broadly defined outcomes allow space for collectively identifying problems and defining areas of attention. Typically, the constituents and activities of a PSC differ from city to city; however, three partners remain constant. They are the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the municipal government (represented by the local public prosecution officer, the local head of police and the mayor). A number of welfare organizations are also represented, including mental health and addiction care, housing corporations and probation.

In keeping with the integrated approach, the work at the PSCs is organized around different “cluster tables.” Generally, a PSC has four to eight cluster tables, including juvenile delinquents, (adult) multiple offenders, domestic violence, multi-problem families and post-incarceration care. In addition, PSCs may form other themes or area-based clusters depending on local needs.

Individual cases are addressed at cluster table meetings by representatives (attending on an as-needed basis) of partner organizations. The most frequent participants are representatives of the municipal government, the police (often a neighbourhood police officer who knows the individuals being discussed) and a public prosecution officer (when the case involves criminal activity). Other participants, depending on the case, may include representatives from child protection services, mental health care organizations or youth workers. In addition, other professionals may be invited to share information considered relevant for forming a more complete picture of the individual(s) discussed. During these meetings, tasks and responsibilities are determined, and representatives communicate the agreements back to their organization (See Box 1). By offering a spatial nucleus for co-operation, significant changes in process are visible

in how problems are interpreted and handled, and how networks centred on PSCs perform.

Once a week, one of the four selected neighbourhoods is discussed during a meeting. The following people gather around the table: a municipal employee from an agency dealing with public order and safety (who chairs the meeting), two youth workers, a neighbourhood police officer, and representatives from the child protection services, a youth probation office and a youth care agency. Five cases will be discussed in the hour-long meeting.

For each case, at least three or four participants know the individual and some aspect of his or her particular situation personally. They hold different knowledge and views on the case derived from their relationship to the individual. Taken together, a multifaceted image of the individual is sketched out, including family relations, school performance, track record of delinquency, leisure activities and social network. To illustrate an approach facilitated by the cluster meeting, we can look at how participants handle the case of one youth seen as being “on the wrong track” (hanging out with older petty criminals) but otherwise “not a bad apple.”

One of the youth workers tells the other participants a bit about the family situation, pointing out that the parents are also concerned about their child but do not know what to do. Both parents are worried that the government, if involved, will try to take their son away. The father bears a grudge against the police, so it is preferable that they do not approach the family. Other than that, the youth worker argues, the parents are an easily approachable couple. The municipal employee suggests that he offer the family some support from the municipality and suggest solutions. The youth worker emphasizes the need for a considered approach, which the parents are more likely to welcome and trust. The youth worker and the municipal employee agree to talk to the parents together, but will first speak to the youth’s uncle (a well respected resident of another neighbourhood who has previously worked with the municipality)

and ask him to introduce them to the parents.

It is decided that the youth will be offered a place in a municipality-sponsored after-school program and that the parents will be invited to a talk with a family coach. Furthermore, the case will be brought to the juvenile delinquency cluster to ensure that no overlaps take place and that relevant information about the case has not been missed.

Having reached agreement on the first case, the meeting proceeds with the remaining cases, all handled through a similar multi-perspective approach. At the end of the meeting, the decisions are summarized and participants return to their organizations to undertake the agreed-upon actions, all aware of each other’s activities. The cases will be reviewed and discussed in one month’s time (should nothing drastic happen in the meantime), when the next meeting about this particular neighbourhood takes place.

BOX 1: Example of a Case Discussion within a Cluster for a Specific Neighbourhood

INTERPRETATION OF PROBLEMS

According to the PSC perspective, problems relating to safety originate with individuals and are aggravated by poor co-ordination among public sector organizations. To address these issues, an individual, “person specific” approach is taken, and organizational deficiencies are handled through better co-operation.

The person based approach provides participants with a greater awareness of the frequently multifaceted nature of a case. The stories about individuals, offered from the multiple views of participants, serve to nuance interpretation, thus avoiding a limited view of the person discussed. This nuance may have a profound influence on how a case is approached, even from a judicial standpoint. A representative of the Public Prosecution Service consulted for this study was keen to point out that the Service’s goal is “not [to] advocate as long a sentence as possible, but [to advocate] the most appropriate measure for the case at hand.” Moreover, he claimed that multiple views frequently facilitated the identification of an appropriate measure. For other organizational repre-

sentatives, in particular the care oriented ones, multiple viewpoints often led to better insights.

FROM MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS TOWARDS “NEW” PROBLEMS

Working together regularly entails discovering problems. Through the intense organizational relationships playing out at PSCs, overlaps, contradictions and gaps may be identified faster and more easily. Although deficiencies in public sector organizations may not be immediately remedied, awareness is a first step. Deficiencies are collectively identified by representatives sharing information and experiences. Through this practice, they also attempt to anticipate new problem areas.

Multiple organizations working together at the PSCs seem to offer greater opportunities for identifying emerging problem areas. Occasionally, they mobilized resources to handle problems more rapidly than had the network not existed. At more established PSCs, this dynamic has resulted in new theme-based clusters being added to their activity area. One example is a “pimp boys” cluster that uses the multi-organizational approach to deal with young men who force their girlfriends into prostitution. Also at the more recently established PSCs, new clusters begin to take shape as organizations share their experiences of street-level work. One example of this process is the identification of a growing number of Central- and Eastern-European citizens who are seen to have a negative impact on social safety because they cannot find work in the Netherlands and therefore end up on the streets. Another example is immigrants who have been denied asylum or a residence permit but who do not exit the country. These individuals do not have a legal right to public services, but may of course still need them. These are but some examples of the many cluster problems that may emerge when safety and care oriented organizations work closely together. Although clear approaches to such problems may still be lacking, their joint identification may enable faster and better co-ordinated action than was possible before.

PRACTICES IN DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

The steps towards genuine co-operation involve sharing information, experiences and perspectives. In the

newer PSCs, establishing co-operation involves building files around the cases. Although this may seem trivial, the active sharing of information about individual cases represents a major shift in practice. Awareness of other organizations’ activities regarding a case enables action to be more effectively co-ordinated. This initial information-sharing is as much about becoming familiar with the case as getting to know the other partners around the table. With differing core businesses, perspectives and organizational cultures, building relationships and trust requires time and effort. It is only once trust and a thorough knowledge of each others’ competences and limitations are established that the network at the PSCs can begin to generate innovative approaches.

Dealing with the problems caused by individuals, or an individual’s problem, starts with collecting information and building a shared file of the case. This information is then discussed among the representatives at one of the cluster meetings. Representatives also consider appropriate measures and decide on a course of action.

Where this situation is unclear or agreement cannot be reached, the case is discussed at greater length at another meeting to which additional participants may be invited to share relevant information. Once appropriate measures are identified and action is agreed upon, the decisions are communicated to the representatives’ organizations for implementation.

DEVELOPMENT OF DIFFERENT ROUTINES

There are significant differences in the interpretation and resolution of problems by the clusters and also in the style of approaches taken. It is not possible to generalize along cluster lines, as each group of professionals develops its own culture, determined partly by the character of the participants and the cases at hand.¹¹ To illustrate these differences, however, we can explore the two most common clusters: juvenile delinquents and (adult) multiple offenders. Although these examples have limitations, they show the considerable effect of problem interpretation on the range of selected actions.

Participants around a cluster dealing with juvenile delinquency most often include a neighbourhood police officer, a youth worker who knows the person discussed, representatives of the municipal authorities and the

Youth and Family Centre and, if relevant, representatives from mental health care, child protection agencies and parole offices specializing in young offenders. Other parties, such as school teachers, football coaches or family members may also be invited. As can be expected, the participants frequently have differing relationships with the person and often hold highly divergent views. With these multiple viewpoints, the image of the individual becomes increasingly intricate, and a better understanding of the uniqueness of the case evolves.

Within clusters dealing with adult multiple offenders, there is less optimism for a positive outcome, and the approach tends to lean towards getting troublesome individuals off the street by punitive means. Many cases in this cluster involve drug or alcohol abuse, and individuals often have a history of mental health problems. Frequently, they have exhausted a range of legal measures without much improvement. As the severity of their offences rarely justifies longer-term imprisonment, many of these individuals continue to commit petty crimes and cause a public nuisance. One of the more common measures suggested for these cases involves the Institution for Persistent Repeat Offenders (*Inrichting voor Stelselmatige Daders* or ISD).¹² Through an ISD, an individual committing even a petty crime is kept off the streets for two years while receiving treatment in a closed institution. While in many cases participants around the cluster table view this as an appropriate measure, it is the duty of the representative of the Public Prosecution Service to inform them about the limitations of this approach. Indeed, where many resources have already been exhausted and where there appears to be little belief in the opportunity for positive change, the preferred measures tend to be punitive rather than preventive (see Box 2).

PSCs are thought to play a central role in dealing with multiple offenders causing a nuisance and committing petty crime. “That’s where the PSC comes in...,” says a representative from a mental health care organization, “...to deal with those cases that fall in between—people who are not really criminals but cause a lot of nuisance. For example, people who are constantly drunk and walk around the train station, talking to people, urinating in public and then yelling at the police when approached. Those people are thus the

target...those causing offences that don’t justify long [prison] sentences. [...] You know, the legal system is not set up to deal with that kind of stuff.” A common practice in dealing with this is to ask particular neighbourhood police officers to pay extra attention to these individuals; in essence, to “hunt” them down.

The primary intention of this practice is to reduce the number of offences these individuals commit. In practice, however, it often means that the individuals simply get caught for committing offences more frequently than before. As a consequence, they build up an extensive list of offences with the police, which is subsequently passed on to the PSC. When reviewed at the PSC, these individuals are seen as major obstacles to social safety and, lacking alternative instruments, a stay at an Institution for Persistent Repeat Offenders is often recommended.

BOX 2: Hunting ‘em Down

BOUNDED INNOVATION

In addition to applying the tools at hand from a multi-actor perspective, dealing with problems at PSCs often involves thinking beyond standard procedures and existing measures. While the absence of a clear structure and the vague definitions of tasks allow space for developing new approaches, the extent of innovation is unsurprisingly limited by existing rules and regulations governing work in the public sector. But even working within administrative and legal frameworks, new interpretations do take shape. One successful way of dealing with a problem that has been attributed to co-operation at the PSCs is the approach to post-incarceration care and prevention.¹³ Where individuals used to be released from prison with little more than a train ticket in hand, participants at PSCs are now co-ordinating action to provide a decent living for ex-convicts, including making housing arrangements, assisting in finding employment and, if necessary, providing counselling. These improved services are thought to reduce recidivism and thus contribute to public safety through prevention.

Another example of a non-traditional measure conceived at a PSC is the “discouraging talk.” These involve high-risk youths with little evidence of criminal activity

who are invited to the police station for a one-on-one discussion. Once in conversation, the police reveal that they have been told that the youth is involved in illegal activities and is being monitored. Furthermore, the youth is “considered warned,” told to stay away from such business and cautioned that the “discouraging talk” will be taken into consideration should the rumours turn out to be true. In having these talks, it is assumed that the behaviour of the high-risk youth will change for the better, and safety will be improved through prevention. Whether these talks have any effect is uncertain, but their existence shows a desire to develop and try out new approaches to deal with uncertainty.

The ability and willingness to experiment at PSCs is largely due to the space given for such ventures, combined with the multiple perspectives and resources available through participating representatives. It is also due in part to the status of a PSC as something of a last resort. As one participant mused, “If we are not able to deal with it, who is?”

PERFORMING NETWORKS

The networks associated with the PSCs are neither stable nor static; they need continual and considered action by participants to function effectively. One ongoing task of participants is to ensure that the work adds value to the partner organizations, given their ongoing investment of resources. Likewise, representatives are expected to ensure their organization’s work has visibility and contributes to the objective of social safety through effective co-operation with other organizations. The first step involves getting to know the competences, cultures and limitations of other organizations. In taking this step, sharing a physical location seems to contribute to a positive experience of co-operation.

CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE

In anticipation of critique from adversaries, PSC proponents frequently claim that they are “not just talking, but *doing*.” In fact, much of the time at PSCs is spent talking. But talking *is* doing, to the extent that information and experience is shared and networks are created, strengthened and maintained. A high percentage of time at the PSCs is dedicated to meetings and, as well, there is

quite a lot of unscheduled, informal interaction between representatives of partner organizations. Almost all representatives consulted for this study mentioned the possibility of “just walking in next door to speak with someone” from a partner organization as one of the immediate and most obvious benefits of participating in the PSC. Although everyday interaction seems to fill an important function at PSCs, the peak of information-sharing takes place at the cluster tables, where concrete cases are discussed and analyzed, and where organizations come together for a shared purpose.

While sharing information is an essential component of building trust between participants, this is not enough to create a functional network. Beyond information-sharing, the common effort to identify problems and articulate some form of shared objective seems to play a vital role in grounding co-operation. Part of this process involves developing a common language among participants (see Box 3). With backgrounds in various disciplines and different organizational cultures, it may prove difficult for participants to reach the understanding necessary for cooperative relationships. But with time, willingness and focused effort, participants may strengthen their bonds by developing collective knowledge expressed in a similar understanding of concepts, ambitions and visions.

At times, tensions that arise at the PSCs may be the cause of diminishing trust between representatives. An enduring challenge is to determine what information on individual cases is relevant and whether it should be shared. This challenge was evident at an event that centred on a PSC a few years back.

A youth committed a serious offence that gained a great deal of media attention. When the matter escalated, the youth regretted his action and told a youth worker that he wanted to tell the truth. This youth worker, a PSC participant, told the other participants around a cluster table (including a police officer) that he knew who the perpetrator was and that the youth wanted to tell the truth. An agreement was made to let the youth speak with one of the municipality’s aldermen before reporting to the police station. At the last moment, the youth changed his mind. At this point,

however, the police officer from the cluster table had already informed his supervisors of the plan. When the plan changed, the police officer was ordered to identify the youth worker involved. The youth worker was taken in to the police station and during interrogation he revealed information that the youth had given him in confidence. As can be expected, this event severely strained the trust between the participants and also damaged the youth's trust in the youth worker.

Most PSCs have set up privacy covenants to prevent situations like this. In practice, however, the extent of information-sharing appears to present an ongoing dilemma. Whereas it may be possible to clearly regulate information relating to criminal activity, the matter becomes increasingly difficult when dealing with information concerning the mental health of individuals. Participants are left to act upon their own judgment.

BOX 3: An Open Exchange of Information?

BUILDING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Linked to the creation of a common language among representatives at PSCs are the individuals' roles as translators between organizations. While representatives need to develop the skill to communicate the intricacies of their own organization to other participants in the PSCs on the one hand, they also need to communicate effectively the activities, agreements and decisions in the other direction. Representatives' performance in this role is critical for the functioning of the network, as they constitute the connecting lines. In practice, this communication role entails a careful balance between complying with their organization's culture and structure, and meeting the demands for flexibility and dedication to the PSC.

With each organization having only a few representatives, people get to know one another more easily, which improves the performance of the networks. The fact that most participants meet frequently (often daily and at least weekly) helps create and maintain relationships, and deepens the understanding of each other's actions or lack of action. When organizations have direct links through personal connections at the PSCs, it is easier

to hold other organizations accountable for agreements made.

ALL FOR ONE...

Another essential component in the performance of networks at PSCs is the principle that all organizations participate on equal terms and through non-hierarchical relationships. This may prove difficult in practice, as some organizations have more resources, some representatives have stronger mandates or there may be histories of strained organizational relationships. One way the PSCs have promoted equality is to let participants from different organizations function as chairpersons during cluster meetings, thereby attempting to avoid the establishment of hierarchical relationships among participants. As the function of the network depends on voluntary co-operation, the full commitment of all participants is in everyone's best interest. By discouraging forms of organizational hierarchy, co-operation seems more likely to occur.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The first PSC emerged as a collaborative network at the local level and, with political and academic support, developed into a concept that was implemented in various contexts. The story raises the questions of whether a network can be designed and implemented and, if so, what considerations should be made.

As a phenomenon, the PSC can be viewed as a new form of governance network emerging from interactions around concrete problems at the local level. Conversely, it can be viewed as a policy instrument intended to remedy organizational deficiencies in the public sector. Although both views can be argued validly, tension arises when attempting to formalize an emerging development at the policy level. In this process, the practices of particular individuals in particular settings have been integrated with policy objectives and transferred and transformed into solutions for different problems. Despite attempts to formalize these networks, they remain unstable because they depend on loose relationships among individuals. These relationships, however, may serve to strengthen anticipative and adaptive capacity within the PSCs.

Because PSC networks are unstable and non-static, they require careful negotiation. In the absence of organizational structures, co-operation ultimately depends on individual participants' capacity to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships by generating trust in and knowledge of other partners. Acting as organizational links, participants fulfill a translating function in the networks and bridge different organizational cultures, core businesses and competencies. In this sense, the networks are continually maintained by the individual actors, who must balance the integrity of their organization with the needs within the network.

An apparent strength of the PSCs is the opportunity to collectively pursue creative approaches to problems identified through co-operation—a strength that may be enhanced by the absence of routine and stability. Stabilizing the networks could limit the uniqueness of approaches at PSCs and consequently undermine their value. At the same time, PSCs depend on voluntary partnerships with formal organizations connected through individual representatives. The lack of stability puts increased pressure on these participants. Balancing the need for flexibility within the networks and the integrity of participating organizations is an ongoing issue.

Another issue is the challenge of providing discernable and clear results. Until now, PSCs have largely been spared performance targets, however, it is just a matter of time before demands to legitimize expenses arise. It is indeed very difficult to indicate the performance of PSCs, given their stated objectives of facilitating collaboration around specific problems and contributing to broadly defined policy goals, such as providing public safety. PSCs have no mandate of their own and rely on the work undertaken by partner organizations for their achievements. The essence of a PSC is co-operation, but how can co-operation be measured? All or any of the organizations involved could claim that their actions are responsible for reducing crime and public nuisance. It is unfeasible to isolate the actual effect of a single PSC, let alone all PSCs. This attribution problem, however, does not mean that attempts to show effect have not been made. Until now, a small number of evaluations of individual PSCs have portrayed the entire phenomenon as both effective and successful.¹⁴

Participants will also want performance indicators to justify their ongoing participation. Whatever the meas-

urement of performance, it has to give partner organizations a sense of the value of their participation. Furthermore, an indication of effective performance could give individual representatives recognition that their efforts do make a difference, and thereby give impetus for continued endeavours within PSCs.

ENDNOTES

1. In researching this case study, interviews were conducted with managers at four PSCs (November 2009 to January 2010) and with representatives of partner organizations at two PSCs (December 2009 to February 2010). Observations were made at meetings and discussions at two PSCs (January and February 2010). The following websites were consulted: Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety (www.hetccv.nl); Ministry of Justice (www.minjus.nl); Ministry of Interior Affairs and Kingdom Relations (www.minbzk.nl); official website for all PSCs (www.veiligheidshuizen.nl); portal for PSCs (www.veiligheidshuis.nl); portal to PSCs in Breda, Tilburg, and Bergen of Zoom (www.veiligheidshuis.org); Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (www.wodc.nl); the Dutch Government (www.regering.nl).
2. The themes are (1) external relations, (2) the economy, (3) sustainability and the environment, (4) social cohesion, (5) public safety and security, and (6) the government's role in providing services.
3. The Balkenende IV Cabinet refers to the (fourth) coalition government headed by Prime Minister Balkenende. This government fell on February 20, 2010.
4. Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, *Samen werken – samen leven*.
5. Ibid,70.
6. Ministerie van Justitie / Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, *Safety Begins with Prevention: Continuing Building a Safer Society*.
7. Ministerie van Justitie / Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, *Naar een veiliger samenleving*.
8. Ministerie van Justitie / Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, *Veiligheid begint bij Voorkomen. Voortbouwen aan een Veiliger Samenleving*.
9. Fijnaut and Zaat, *De sociale (on)veiligheid in Tilburg*.
10. It is difficult to determine the specific role played by the PSC in this development, as it cannot be isolated from other efforts. Nevertheless, these positive results are frequently attributed to the cooperative approach at the PSC.
11. Box 1 and Box 2 illustrate how problems are perceived and dealt with at two particular cluster tables.
12. The ISD measure has been available as a sentence since 2004, and is administered by the Ministry of Justice. Placement in an ISD is a fairly severe measure and requires a court order. Due to its severity and cost (which is paid by the Ministry of Justice), it is not widely or lightly applied.
13. The responsibility for providing post-incarceration care for ex-detainees was decentralized from the national level to the municipal government through agreements made in 2008. An “ex-detainee cluster” is now one of the most common clusters at PSCs.
14. Ministerie van Justitie, “Veiligheidshuizen effectief”.

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FROM NS6 TO NS WORLD

THE NEW SYNTHESIS PROJECT

The New Synthesis Project is an international partnership of institutions and individuals who are dedicated to advancing the study and practice of public administration. While they hail from different countries, different political systems and different historical, economic and cultural contexts, all share the view that public administration as a practice and discipline is not yet aligned with the challenges of serving in the 21st century.

THE NEW SYNTHESIS 6 NETWORK

In 2009, Madame Jocelyne Bourgon invited six countries to join the New Synthesis Network (NS6), composed of officials, scholars and experts from Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Committed to supporting practitioners whose work is becoming increasingly difficult, this network has engaged close to 200 people from more than 24 organizations. Their efforts have resulted in five international roundtables, five post-roundtable reports, and 17 case studies. Collectively, this work has generated significant insights into preparing governments to serve in the 21st century.

The Network's findings have been captured in the publication of a new book entitled *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, and is available in print and electronic formats from McGill-Queen's University Press. Its signature contribution is the presentation of an enabling governance framework that brings together the role of government, society and people to address some of the most complex and intractable problems of our time.

TOWARDS NS WORLD

So where to from here? Reconfiguring and building the capacities of government for the future cannot be accomplished through the publication of a single book. It is a continuous journey which requires the ongoing sharing and synthesis of ideas, as well as the feedback, learning and course adjustments that can only be derived by testing ideas in action.

And so the journey continues and the conversation expands. Our goal is to build upon the rich partnership of the original six participating countries by opening up this exchange with others—wherever they may be located. We seek to create an international community that connects all leaders—from government, the private sector and civil society—committed to helping prepare governments for the challenges ahead.

Next stages of this work will include virtual exchanges supported by web 2.0 technologies, as well as possible thematic and regionally-based networks and events. But no matter the vehicles, success can only be achieved through the active participation and collaboration of those passionate about making a difference.

We encourage you to stay tuned to nsworld.org for more information about how to get engaged.

Published by



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