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Penal Issues

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Restoring public's trust in the police: auxiliaries as an innovation in French policing

Jacques de Maillard, Carole Gayet-Viaud and Fabien Jobard describe a survey evaluating an innovation in French policing: police auxiliaries whose objective is to restore public's trust and confidence in the police. The investigation was the object of a research agreement signed in 2014 with the National Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunities, following a joint initiative by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministerial Delegation for Urban Affairs.

The Trust in Police Auxiliaries (henceforth TPA¹) are retired police officers whose mission is to bring the police and the public closer, in neighbourhoods identified as high-priority security-wise; that is, working-class districts, high-rises, and housing projects. This function was created and developed in two phases: first, in 2008 with the President Sarkozy's "Hope for the Suburbs Plan" (*Plan Espoirs Banlieue*), then in 2012 within the Top Priority Security Zones (*Zones de Sécurité Prioritaire*), which, inspired from the notion of "hotspots", were created by the socialist government in August 2012. In 2015 there were 111 auxiliaries: 34 at the Paris Police Headquarters (*PP*), 77 for the rest of the country, under the *Direction centrale de la sécurité publique (DCSP)* that is the Central Directorate of Uniformed Police². In a political context where the relations between the police and the public are deteriorated, as so often described and denounced³, the definition of the overall goal is both vague and ambitious, since, according to the memorandum dated March 11, 2009, "each auxiliary should aim at eliciting a trustful atmosphere in the area to which he/she is assigned, by establishing many personal contacts with the public, the elected officials, the public housing agency, janitors, the National Education personnel, health professionals and neighbourhood associations".

The objective of the survey conducted by the CESDIP was to do a first assessment of the TPA scheme. It observes how the TPAs proceed when attempting to improve relationship between the police and the public. Does this scheme contribute to improving relations between the police and the local population, and over and beyond this, does it represent a noteworthy innovation within the policing institution? To answer these questions, one must first understand

Methodology

In The study was conducted with students from the Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ) University in a Master 2 on "Conflict Analysis" (now named "Prevention and Security Policies"). It consisted of a series of interviews of TPAs, conducted by pairs of students or by one of the three authors of the study, along with an in-depth observation of four local operations by three groups of students ("monographs"). Ten of the interviews with TPAs were conducted in the Seine-Saint-Denis *département*⁴, ten others fell within the province of the Central Directorate of Uniformed Police (outside of Paris and its immediate suburbs, therefore). The monographs were conducted in two cities in the Seine-Saint-Denis *département*, (one in a distant suburb in the Paris area and one in the seat of a regional government). These monographs were written by the students, discussed and evaluated during a collective seminar and included by the three authors in the final report submitted in August 2014⁵. Sites and interviewees, as well as contacts with the auxiliaries, were selected with the agreement and support of the General Director of the National Police. Five main criteria were considered when selecting TPA for interviewing: sex, seniority within the scheme, region of assignment (PP/DCSP), size of the assigned district and political leanings of the particular city. This formed a corpus respecting criteria for diversity, but with no precise control of its representativeness.

what TPA actually do, how capable they are of entering into local partnerships, what ties they have succeeded in establishing with the inhabitants and their representatives, the projects they support, but also the constraints restricting their action

¹The French acronym is DCP, standing for *Délégués à la cohésion police-population*.

²R. The DCSP, with its police stations and emergency squad (police secours), constitutes the most dense territorial network, covering 40% of the population (26.2 million inhabitants) and 75% of problem neighbourhoods, and handling 62% of cases of offending recorded across the entire country, according to the ministry. The PP covers Paris and since 2009, its first outer ring of suburbs

³This has been documented by the activist/community associations as well as by researchers (C. Mouhanna, *La police contre les citoyens ?*, (Nîmes, Champ social, 2011), and R. Lévy, *La police française à la lumière de la théorie de la justice procédurale, Déviance & Société*, 40 (2), 2016, p. 139-164), but is also acknowledged by the institution itself, which explicitly made this concern the theme of its 2012-2013 National Conference. For a comparative overview, see F. Jobard and J. de Maillard, *Sociologie de la police*, (Paris, Armand Colin, 2015), p. 171-197.

⁴The *département* is a basic administrative division of the French territory

⁵See J. de Maillard, C. Gayet-Viaud, F. Jobard, *Les délégués à la cohésion police-population*, CESDIP report for the ACSE, 2014. Our thanks to the 2013-2014 Master students on « Conflict analysis » for their active implication.

1. The TPA as interface between the police and the public

Most TPAs are former officers (less frequently, senior officers) who had worked in street policing. Recruiting has been somewhat rationalised, in fact, following early enrolment on a volunteer basis, with no attention paid to the person's profile. This had brought in workers whose career had mostly been spent in criminal investigation (CI) and who had no real familiarity with neighbourhood issues pertaining. Fifteen of the 27 TPAs encountered have what is called a "simple" profile, which is to say they spent their whole working career in a same department, usually uniformed police (this was the case for ten of them, with a detective profile for four others and only one with a career in police headquarters). The other twelve TPA have a combined profile (they worked in several departments in the course of their career), most with some time in uniformed police (only one had a CI/Intelligence profile).

Organisational origin of EICPPs

Simple profile	Uniformed police	10
	Criminal investigation	4
	Specialised services	1
Combined profile	Uniformed police + criminal investigation	4
	Other combinations (but including some time as uniformed police)	7
	Combined, but no uniformed police	1

These profiles, predominantly characterised by much experience in uniformed police, are consonant with the skills required of TPAs. However varied their missions (more or less focused on a single high-priority activity or, conversely, on a broader range of interventions) as well as the areas in which they work (ranging from a single neighbourhood to a whole city), their portraits point up some recurrent elements which have much to do with the local anchorage required for their interventions, to neighbourhood policing, so to speak.

Many do indeed define themselves as an interface, a link, a facilitator, which in fact corresponds to the goal of this innovation in policing:

"So my role is varied, and has many aspects, but OK, I feel like saying I'm a kind of interface between, really, the police station, I mean the police, but here, the police means the police station, and the town, but the town in the broader sense, including town hall, the public housing agencies, the local associations, the janitors..." (City 1)

For those who implement it, this "cohesion"-improvement activity between the police and the public has several different facets: listening, communication, exchange, and informal regulation.

1.1. Listening

TPAs stress their ability to provide an "entrance point" to the police station, by offering claimants an overall, well-meaning reception and then being able to refer them to the right service, to convey their problems, and also rephrase those in the language, operational forms and time frames of various institutions. This translation into bureaucratic categories takes place on two levels, both as appeasement and as a relay toward operational services, making the police more approachable:

"I do follow-up. People on active duty don't do that - they can't - they have so much work to do. What I do is, from time to time, two weeks, a month, six months later, I give a call, I ask, 'is every-

thing going well, no problems, is everything OK?'" (City 7)

This interpersonal work is made easier by the fact that the TAPs are no longer fully, effectively police officers, so that they can do what French police officers usually refrain from doing, at least when working as uniformed police: set an appointment outside the police station, give their phone number, ensure a continuous presence on the ground.

1.2. Communicating and explaining

Communicating is an extension of listening. It involves the ability of TPAs to explain how the organisation functions and how their colleagues work, what they don't have time to do and why. This is a dimension of their activity they describe as educational, and which involves informing people about the professional and procedural constraints of the criminal justice system:

"An officer doesn't always have the time to explain things, whereas an auxiliary can, he has the time to do it [...] For an officer who has work to do, it isn't always easy or obvious to give all kinds of explanations to people, whereas an auxiliary can play that role." (City 6)

"Now, what I do is I tell them, that of course, the police won't come in the next five minutes, or in ten minutes, people want them to be there immediately... It's human, we all reason that way. But I explain that it all depends on whether there are other more urgent missions, etc., but they did come a half hour later, for instance; so, surprise, you see! Actually, that already lets me establish a connection with those people, and have that follow-up." (City 21)

Communication is particularly important given the weight of the procedures that structure the police officers' day-to-day work, with TPAs coming afterward to explain misunderstood police interventions or neutralise rumours:

*"At 6 A.M., a central squad has just taken in a big bad guy in *** [area], they smashed the door with battering rams to get in, that's a bit... 'So, what's going on?' So I go over there, [they said to me] 'hey, why didn't you tell us sooner?' 'Firstly, because I didn't know, and had I known, I wouldn't have told you, because the word gets around'... There you are, so it's really to oil up the cogs, after that people accept, once you've explained things. But as long as you haven't given them an explanation, they don't accept it." (City 2)*

1.3. Exchanging

This communication work can evolve into a more or less periodic exchange. A TPA who manages to establish a trustful relationship subsequently obtains information:

"Once a month, with the captain in charge of the police station, we hold meetings with the local residents at the community centre or the headquarters of an association. We don't hold them at the police station because people wouldn't come. About 10 to 15 people come. It's an open discussion, we explain our missions, I take the opportunity to introduce myself to people who don't know me yet, and the captain explains how we function. After that, it's an open exchange, and that's when people talk. Afterwards I make an appointment with those of them who have something to say. We manage to get quite a lot of information after all, especially in the housing projects, in those areas." (city 10b)

The information collected pertains to the atmosphere in the area or to the inhabitants' problems. Above all, they feed a new logic of exchanging, in which the police department is viewed as a partner in regulating local problems.

1.4. Regulating

Last, the activity of TPAs largely involves mediation work on behalf of the quality of life of/in the neighbourhood, and serving its inhabitants. A significant portion of their time is therefore devoted to settling petty conflicts and quarrels in which they act as

mediators. They travel around, investigate, sometimes they call people in, and take the time to listen to all sides in the conflict. A variety of infra-penal issues are dealt with in this framework, including nuisances and neighbourhood problems, disorderly conduct and incivilities (noise, dirt, wrecks, damage to property, troublesome occupancy, conflicts)⁶ and family or marital problems.

“That means we settle things informally, and we do referrals about problems. We refer people to the right partners. Take the House of Justice and Law, across the street, for instance. Two or three months ago, I saw a Congolese man whose wife attended the Evangelist church in [a neighbouring town]. But she went so often that apparently there may have been a problem. So the pastor was kind of manipulative, well, I don’t really know what he did. So this man reported it to the police. When I saw that, since reports to the police aren’t always followed up, I tried to see if I could meet that man. And it’s a fact, it has gotten to the point where she doesn’t take care of her three kids any more, they’re in school, so I advised him, in case he was considering separation, or even a divorce, to go to the family affairs judge at the courthouse, and maybe see a counsellor. They have one on call at the House of Justice and Law, once a week, for marital issues. OK, now, this has to be followed up.” (City 11)

TPAs provide possibilities for solving some issues, then, without having them handled through a legal procedure. If there is a problem with a landlord, for instance, they engage in a dialogue before any formal notice is given; when a problem vehicle (over-parked car, wreck, damaged car) is identified, they determine who is the owner so that he may move it and avoid having it towed away. The inhabitants trust them also because they show that it is possible to try to settle matters out of court, to have a sense of restraint, and of proportionate action, fitting individual cases, when articulating means and ends.

TPAs collect information, then, hear complaints and questions, and pass them on. This facilitates access to the institution, making it approachable for residents, so that TPAs are approached by people who no longer dial 17 (the police emergency number) or call the police station because they are fed up with being rebuffed or never having their needs answered, especially for disturbances of the peace, such as uproars.

This type of action extends the perimeter of policing all the more effectively since TPAs deal mostly with people who are not within the usual circle of partners encountered by the police department in local partnership meetings, since they meet with ordinary residents, in addition to local community group leaders. Others focus primarily on contacts with vulnerable or at-risk individuals, such as the elderly and shopkeepers. In the Seine-Saint-Denis *département*, the main goal is actually to train those people in situational prevention. The range of contacts obviously varies with the local context. TPAs working in the vicinity of shopping centres tend to deal more with businesses, whereas in other places they may take advantage of the local citizens’ groups or target the schools, as leverage for communicating on policing. Above all, their ability to act, as they circulate on the outskirts of their assigned police station, depends enormously on the legitimacy they have earned both within the police, among their colleagues, and in the community where they work.

2. TPAs: on the fringes of the police

TPAs are actors in policing on the fringes of their own institution. Although retired, they remain within the police station walls; they are perceived as members of the police department but are not officially charged with a public service mission and have none of the prerogatives of the police. However uncomfortable at the outset, this situation may nonetheless be turned to

⁶ On incivilities in the French context and debates, see Carole Gayet-Viaud French Cities’ Struggle Against Incivilities: from Theory to Practices in Regulating Urban Public Space, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 2017, 23, 1, 77-97, ISSN: 0928-1371 (Print) 1572-9869 (Online)

their advantage if they manage to convert marginality into a dividend, with returns in freedom and flexibility in their work.

2.1. Carving out one’s place in-house

TPAs are reservists, formally under the command of the district head, and therefore not belonging to any group or squad, nor are they represented by any union. The missions to which they are assigned are seemingly not part of the “core job” of policing (to use an expression often referred to by management and the unions). Understandably, then, they are not given priority for the allocation of resources, which are mostly intended for the so-called “active” departments. TPAs do not always have an office in the police station, in which to welcome the public:

“The only thing that’s lacking is I don’t have an office, but that will happen. Because sometimes, if you want to see people... That way I could have set hours during the week so people could come, they would know I’m there that day. Normally, that’s programmed. A police station in the northern sector is being renovated, and there will be an office there. Here, it’s impossible, there isn’t any room. That could be advantageous, having regular office hours twice a month.” (City 15)

In addition to this structurally marginal position, there is occasionally the incomprehension of young colleagues who are dubious, suspicious, or even scornful of those “veterans” who have decided to go back to work. The lack of a clear definition of their mission does not facilitate the integration of those incongruous colleagues in the familiar landscape. Judged too old, difficult to define (it’s not clear what he or she does), sometimes too close to the population, TPAs accumulate features that set them aside from “real police officers” within an institution that values action and strength, especially at the beginning of their assignment.

“People are jealous, they see us as old people coming in to take the money. Reservists, profiteers [...] When I arrived, I had to work to be accepted, without treading on anybody’s turf. You have to ask, without making yourself obnoxious, get others to do things...” (City 10c)

“I’m not sure my colleagues see any value to our mission. Not at first, in any case. When we arrive, we aren’t of any use to them, we help ourselves to a piece of desk sometimes, we’re bothersome. We’re retired, we go back to work, they don’t always like it, and they have no great desire to help us.” (City 16)

Their disconnection from the main, operational activity and from the chain of command, which at the same time is the prerequisite for their considerable autonomy, may lead some TPAs to view this as: *“The main difficulty... It’s significant that I get more recognition outside than inside.” (City 3)*

But external recognition does not come to them automatically, to compensate for the difficulties experienced within their institutional base. It is the outcome of a search for legitimacy, which the TPA must undertake alone.

2.2. Finding one’s path outside the institution

Outside, on “the ground”, where they are asked to “be receptive to the expectations of the population (so as) to enable uniformed officers to win back its trust in areas where ties have been overly distended”, according to the in-service note dated May 11, 2009, TPAs are all alone. It is up to them to develop the know-how needed to establish trustful ties and partnership networks, especially in those cities where the police has hardly developed any concrete partnerships. At the onset of their work, TPAs are particularly left to their own devices, since the district head rarely gives their work priority on the in-house scene, and with few exceptions, no arrangements are made for communicating on their existence and publicizing it locally. Their mission is still too often confidential, making it difficult to contact citizens’ groups and all of the partners in local security and prevention policies: it is a repetitious, laborious, sometimes thankless task.

*"What was difficult for me was to reach out, because in ***, town hall is everywhere, it's present in so many situations: with the citizens' groups, the landlords, so even with the town, I arrived somewhat like an intruder. When I went to see people at town hall... 'Hello', everyone was polite, but they weren't opening their doors, that was my big problem. Now they're wide open. I had to... I had to work at it." (City 20)*

Even in precincts known to them because they had worked there previously, they have to "show them you're there":

"When I arrived, I said to myself= 'What am I going to do? How will things go?' I knew the neighbourhood because I had worked there, I had a few contacts, after all, but at the beginning I wasn't invited to meetings at the prefecture or at town hall, or other. Those meetings are attended by a lot of people, so you learn things that are useful for the police. I didn't quite have to elbow my way in, but I had to show them I existed." (City 15)

2.3. Inventing one's role: the tools

The stories told by TPAs, especially about their period of adjustment to their new function, point out the utility of a variety of resources for acquiring their status and achieving recognition. First, patience and perseverance over time, which are the underpinnings of trust. Viewed as UFOs (as one of them put it) by their colleagues at first, TPAs settle in slowly, gradually gaining other people's confidence and then converting this confidence into in-house capital:

"With time, you manage to communicate and on one or two cases you learn to work together. I'm not saying we're pals, but I'm respected ... Once I got a fantastic piece of operational intelligence ... It was about dealers in a housing project. I had met a kid from the project in a neighbourhood meeting, and he said: 'Listen, I'm fed up. If you don't mention my name, because my mother still lives here...' He gave me a bunch of information that the outfit didn't exploit. OK. But it was straightforward. After that he told me some more stuff, that was exploited." (City 5)

A second resource mentioned is the status acquired during their earlier career. This gives them some ascendancy, or at least a persistent reputation with younger colleagues on the lower echelons. The TPA can then "play the old hand":

*It's important to have been in the upper echelons, because that way you can go to see the commanding officers, say 'tu' familiarly when talking to them, you know them, and if you need something, the fact of having been a commanding officer yourself, of having been a senior officer ... Well, some people do without it, eh, like Mr. X, in ***, who manages very well, he's very well integrated. But otherwise, it's true that it enables you to put those people in their place when they would gladly look down on you." (City 10c)*

The crucial factor for in-house trust remains the superior officer's respect for the TPA's mission. The latter is answerable to no one, and a lack of connection with the local superior officer would condemn him or her to indifference. Interviewees all impute their success at work for a large part to the confidence shown them by their district head or by the commanding officer to whom responsibility for follow-up of their job has been delegated. Being accepted within the police station then enables them to participate in the circulation of information (sometimes police stations even take the initiative of sending them on missions that cannot be handled by the operational staff):

"The captain gets a letter from someone who tells him something. If it isn't a problem requiring direct action, legal or other, like problems between neighbours, or something, I'm given the letter and I have time, I make contact, etc. Like for people who dial 17 because of an uproar at night, if they can't go because they lack personnel at the time, they send us the coordinates of the person who called. And I'm the one who makes contact, afterwards, during the day, with that person, and I take care of the problem." (City 10b)

When those requisites are met – being well established in one's mission and having one's legitimacy acknowledged – TPAs may convert their ambiguous half-police officer/half partner status into a valued resource, with respect to both the police department and the public.

2.4. On the margins of the institution

The main resource exploitable by TPAs within the institution is provided by their work outside it. It is the quality of their relationship with the population that earns them the confidence of their hierarchical superior and sometimes even of active police officers. TPAs come to be viewed by their colleagues as specialists in relations with the public. Thanks to their on-going presence in the district they develop relationships, as opposed to the uniformed officers who only show up during episodes when the tension is high or for interventions in private homes, or else are accompanied (at the time of our fieldwork) by various squads generally assimilated with repressive, distant policing policies (*Compagnies départementales*, Riot Police, Specialized field squads, or other).

The idea is that TPAs move "on the level of people, residents, citizens" (City 10c), as one of them says. Whence their great attention to how they dress and their general appearance. Several are proud of their ability to go around alone, in civilian dress, in places where uniformed officers will only go in a group, armed and very alert. Being on the fringes of the policing institution allows them to get a better reception than the usual police services, although they have no access at all to some areas where TPAs are assimilated to the rest of the police.

Naturally, the vagueness of their status and their marginal position with respect to the institution makes TPAs frequently hear recriminations about the police and the interventions of their colleagues on active duty. Since they are recipients of information and complaints potentially harmful to their parent institution, they have to solve that tension on their own. The situation is particularly uncomfortable or paradoxical in that it is only when they have managed to successfully achieve the first goal of their assignment (winning the trust of the community) that they may learn information that accuses some of their colleagues. TPAs often feel that complaints against their colleagues on active duty are beyond their ambit: it is up to the upper echelons to deal with these (sensitive) issues, since they pertain to discipline and respect for in-house rules.

"Let's say that we're used to dealing with that kind of complaints, they happen often, repeatedly. Now, for me, I may be retired, but basically, I'm still a police officer. If I hear things like 'they're all old schmucks, they do fucking nothing', I'll always defend my colleagues. I'm a police officer, and I work as one... Now, after that, I always try to follow up on the problem. 'That isn't normal, it can't be', it isn't up to me to say that, and anyway, I can't say that. But I try to make sure that afterwards, things go well. Often it's town hall that calls, or Mrs. So-and-so goes over, and I oversee the thing until it's taken care of. I try to be diplomatic, to oil the cogs, but I don't let things lie: I try to protect the upper echelons. The police gets enough flak as it is, it isn't up to me to add onto that, just the opposite." (City 14)

However, TPAs, especially those who are former officers, occasionally do make some remarks to their (young) colleagues if they give someone a bad reception or say something inappropriate, or they may block complainants' access to the institution and handle the problem directly with them.

"If I think there really is a problem on our side, I talk to Mr. X, our chief, and several times he has listened to the recordings and then told the person: 'We didn't do the right thing' or 'What you're saying isn't true, because I listened to the recording and you didn't say that.' He's pretty quick, Mr. X. Once, when we didn't do the right thing, I went to see the person, a public housing agent, to explain it to him: 'It's true, we could have done something, I apolo-

gize, take my phone number in case the problem crops up again.' It did, and the police took action fast. You have to be able to acknowledge your weaknesses." (City 15)

The confidence restored by this new TPA mission (it is less than ten years old) is not risk-free, then, even though it is relatively successful. Indeed, it opens up a space for exchanges in which the worries, and sometimes the despair of citizens, recriminations against the police, damaging testimony, and hard-to-satisfy expectations are all jostling for attention. The mission of trying to gain the confidence of the population, if taken seriously with all its implications, turns out not to be devoid of risk for the policing institution as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The mission of restoring confidence assigned to TPAs is a daring mission: enabling them to support an intermediate level of expression and regulation of day-to-day problems within the community, it reflects acknowledgement, by the institution itself, of its failure in this respect. TPAs thus contribute to the development of *intermediary public spaces*⁷ in which representatives of different institutions get to know each other, share their information, exchange on their problems, and where residents can find someone who will listen to them: someone reliable, personally committed, and trustworthy, which is to say competent and well-intentioned, to whom they can take their problems. They are reminiscent of the justices of the peace or of mediating police officers working in the neighbourhoods, and thus resuscitate the earlier police department's "lost dream of community policing"⁸, perhaps contributing to the reinvention of a specific urban policing tradition.

They repeatedly testify to the rediscovery of the possibility of sharing mutual understanding with ordinary people or of a skill, "knowing how to talk to people", clearly evidencing the importance of these new spaces for dialogue. The main stake is whether these spaces are peripheral or central to policing work. For a division of tasks may come to prevail in police departments, confining the TPA's role of maintaining ties with the public to a subordinate status which does not bring about any change in the institution and suggesting that the concern about relations with the public is not relevant to officers on active duty. Or conversely, the spaces for exchanging elicited by the TPA mission may become places for reformulating and reconstituting a police tradition based on trustful relations with the public. In this respect, the police does not completely control its future: the development of these spaces depends, more broadly, on whether TPAs are integrated in a broader-ranging dynamic of partnership throughout urban space, in which city governments have a pivotal role to play.

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⁷ A. Cottureau, "La désincorporation des métiers, et leur transformation en publics intermédiaires : Lyon et Elbeuf, 1790-1814 », Complete version of the partial publication in S. L. Kaplan, P. Minard (eds.), *La France malade du corporatisme ? XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, (Paris, Belin, 2004), p. 97-147 and 479-493.

⁸ As E. Blanchard puts it in « Les gardiens de la paix parisiens sous la IV^{ème} République. Des policiers de proximité ? » in J.-M. Berlière, R. Lévy (eds.), *Le témoin, le sociologue et l'historien. Quand les policiers se mettent à table* (Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2010), p. 136.