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# Police volunteers in the Netherlands: a study on policy and practice

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## ABSTRACT

Fuelled by the popularity of citizen participation in community safety and by an ongoing pluralisation of policing, there is increasing acknowledgement of volunteer policing around the Western world. Starting with a review of the small body of knowledge that has been built up, our paper outlines the origins and background of police volunteers, their management, their role and the activities they carry out, and records their job satisfaction and working experience. Empirical findings from the Netherlands show that most police volunteers are positive about having the opportunity to do something worthwhile for society, to improve personal skills, and to make connection with regular police colleagues. Yet, at the same time, they are disappointed with their position within the force and feel uncertain about their role. As an institution, the Dutch police tends to undervalue and neglect the work of police volunteers, not least because of slow policy making processes, an unclear vision about the future of volunteer policing, and suspicion about the unwanted substitution of salaried work by voluntary work. This ambiguous attitude runs counter to the current political agenda in favour of a participatory society and active citizenship in the Netherlands, and bears striking resemblance to what is known about the position of police volunteers in UK and in the US.

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## Introduction

Academics have devoted much attention to what they call ‘plural policing’ (Jones and Newburn 2006): the rise of a ‘police extended family’ (Johnston 2003) or a ‘mixed economy’ (Crawford *et al.* 2004) of policing populated by private security guards, municipal law enforcement officers, community support officers and other police auxiliaries. However, within this expanding field of research, the role, work and experiences of police volunteers remain surprisingly underexposed. Police volunteers represent a small subdivision of Western police forces and might therefore be easily ignored. This is in contrast with firefighting, for example, that relies extensively on volunteers (Henderson and Sowa 2017), while fully paid professionals are traditionally dominant in public order provision, law enforcement and criminal investigation around the world. Police volunteers can thus be considered as a minority group within the force, but they still represent large numbers of people who contribute to public policing and community safety, more or less for nothing.

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Police volunteers fit within the plural police service as a form of ‘responsible citizenship’ that is sanctioned and even encouraged by the state. Unlike, for example, private security guards, individual citizens give up some of their spare time to patrol the streets and undertake many other policing duties without any commercial objective (Button 2002, pp. 84–85). Although politicians and policy makers have warmly applauded the ideals of active citizenship and volunteering, Gaston and Alexander (2001) argue that the presence of police volunteers within police forces is somewhat problematic. Managers do not always have an accurate picture of their personal characteristics, circumstances and motives, and this may create disappointment on both sides. Their insight is surprising, since volunteer policing has long historical roots, stretching back to the advent of modern policing itself (Greenberg 2005, Bartels 2014, Dobrin 2017, Leon 2018a).

British and North American scholars have contributed mostly to a small but growing body of knowledge about volunteer police (e.g. Dobrin and Wolf 2016, Bullock and Millie 2018) but have paid little attention to developments outside the Anglo-Saxon world. This paper fills this gap by presenting a study on volunteer policing in the Netherlands. The Dutch term *politievrijwilliger* literally means ‘police volunteer’. Their volunteer activities vary widely and include patrols, administrative duties, investigations, the regulation of local parades and festivals, traffic control and public relations activities directed at schools and neighbourhoods (Torn and Verbiest 2017). Within this, there are two main types of police volunteers in the Netherlands.

The Dutch police explicitly distinguish between uniformed ‘frontline’ volunteers’ (1,685 staff) visibly acting in the public domain and ‘support volunteers’ (1,575 staff) being involved in all sorts of ‘hidden’ administrative and specialist activities. Frontline officers patrol the streets to ‘keep an eye on what is happening around them’ (Uhnnoo and Lofstrand 2018, p. 6) and can be fully armed to serve as law enforcement officers. They wear the same uniforms and possess the same judicial powers as their full-time and paid agency counterparts. As such, these officers come close to ‘special constables’ (SCs) in Anglophone countries (Bullock and Leeney 2016, Bullock and Millie 2018). In addition, the Dutch police deploy Police Support Volunteers (PSVs): public-spirited citizens conducting complementary ‘back office’ duties such as filling in forms, staffing reception desks, performing computer-based work and CCTV monitoring, or offering specific expertise to the police, for example about the complexities behind financial crimes (see e.g. Bullock (2017), Callender *et al.* (2018) and Millie (2018) for similar kinds of PSVs in England and Wales). We look at both types of police volunteers.

Our paper poses four sets of questions about the policy and practice of voluntary policing in the Netherlands: (1) what policy development is taking place within the Dutch police in relation to police volunteers? (2) how are police volunteers managed and supervised? (3) what are their roles and activities? and (4) what are their motivations and experiences? The underlying ambition is to make a comparison with findings in the UK and the US. Since we know little about who police volunteers are, what they do, what drives them and how they judge the police as an organisation, we offer a detailed account of how policy makers, police managers, union spokesmen, and volunteers themselves regard volunteer policing in the Netherlands.

The remainder of our paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly discusses the relationship between the popularity of police volunteers and the ‘responsibilisation’ of citizens in a ‘participatory society’. This overview points to key issues surrounding both the support for police volunteering and its drawbacks. Secondly, we outline our mixed methods approach, combining a questionnaire survey with in-depth interviewing, and present the demographics of our respondents. Thirdly, the paper’s empirical section outlines current Dutch policy making on police volunteering, related management and supervision issues, and police volunteers’ roles, activities, motivations, and job satisfaction. Findings will be compared with the larger international scholarly literature on volunteer police officers. In conclusion, we answer our research questions, reflect on the limitations of our study, and offer opportunities for further investigation.

## Themes in volunteer police literature

The international literature on police volunteers is not voluminous, but several publications nonetheless offer a promising point of departure for the further exploration of volunteer policing in the context of broader discussions about citizens' contributions to public goods such as safety and security. These publications centre on the following themes: the origins and background of current interest in police volunteers; the benefits and costs of volunteer police; and their job satisfaction. These will be discussed in turn below.

### Origins and background

The famous Dutch painting *De Nachtwacht* (The Nightwatch) by Rembrandt van Rijn shows a proud and rich gathering of seventeenth-century citizens who patrolled the streets to keep the peace after dark. Similar situations also prevailed elsewhere. Leon (2018a) argues that the historical duty of citizens to maintain the public order in England and Wales long precedes the dawn of modern policing, and Dobrin (2017) makes an analogous point for the United States. However, a volunteer police force, as we know it today, is a twentieth-century phenomenon and has been transformed from the initial establishment of 'reserve' police forces intended to be deployed in times of (inter)national crises such as outbreaks of rioting, looting, strikes or war (Dobrin 2017, Leon 2018b). The origins of the Dutch volunteer police date back to a reserve police set up in 1948 and authorised to carry firearms, batons and handcuffs as their paid colleagues did. When the Communist threat during the Cold War declined, the presence and duties of reservists changed slowly but surely, as officers became part of regular police teams doing a range of jobs. This led, in 1994, to the launch of an official volunteer police force. At present, the volunteer force in the Netherlands numbers approximately 3,500: 1,685 special constables and 1,575 police support volunteers. In 2013, the Dutch minister of Justice and Public Safety (*Justitie en Veiligheid*) announced that the number of police volunteers should increase to 6,000, but that ambition has not yet been fulfilled (Torn and Verbiest 2017). The political will to invest more effort in volunteering appears to meet organisational resistance from the police and from police unions.

This is quite surprising, because the contribution that volunteering – more specifically, volunteer policing – can make to society and to public service delivery is of growing importance in Western societies. Today's increasing interest in 'active citizenship' has gained momentum in the Netherlands since the Dutch King announced a shift from welfare state arrangements to a 'participatory society' (Hameleers and Vliegenthart 2016), where citizens should actively contribute to the 'common good', including crime prevention and public order maintenance. Reduced budgets seem less of a concern for the Dutch police compared to the UK (Millie 2018) and the US (Dobrin 2017), but, still,

the recurrent message [...] is that the state alone is not, and cannot effectively be, responsible for preventing and controlling crime. [...] It marks what may be the beginning of an important re-configuration of the 'criminal justice state' and its relation to the citizen. (Garland 1996, p. 454)

We may think of the rise of neighbourhood watches in community safety programmes (Van Steden *et al.* 2011) in this context, but the popularity of police volunteers also fits the ambitious political goal of 'responsibilising' people as socially active citizens in the security domain. Following Morgan's observations in the UK, the political deployment of 'responsibilisation' strategies combines 'tough on crime' language with pleas for co-production, partnerships and 'an open dialogue about the shape of policing' (2012, p. 474), which opens the door for various types of citizen participation. Members of the public are warmly invited to join forces with the police by establishing neighbourhood watches and community safety schemes, or to take responsibility by serving the force on a voluntary basis.

### Benefits and costs

In the United Kingdom, Jordan (2012) cautiously claims that long-term investment in citizen participation may have a positive impact on strengthening a 'moral order' built from face-to-face contacts,

reciprocity, and mutual care. Quantitative research by Schreurs *et al.* (2018) also indicates that ‘moral values’ and ‘moral emotions’ are important drivers behind a positive attitude towards active citizenship in the police domain. Furthermore, volunteer participation in policing can help build openness and trust between public professionals and society at large. As Dobrin and Wolf note, ‘volunteer police [...] are a link between the police and those they serve, a way of peeling back the “blue curtain”’ (2016, p. 221). Police departments may also benefit from extra personnel who are able to serve at peak times and seasonal events, such as sporting tournaments and local parades, or who freely offer their technical, medical, financial and other skills to specialised units: ‘the community-at-large can be a large pool of talent from which to draw police volunteers’ (Dobrin 2017, p. 721).

As such, police volunteers, who are not fully socialised into the subculture of public policing, hold the promise of strengthening police-citizen cooperation through community-based activities, giving assistance to vulnerable people, and providing information to students at schools. They most ideally ‘reflect the demographic make-up of the community’ (Gravelle and Rogers 2009, p. 59), so as to build bridges between their own assorted constituencies and the police. ‘Given recent community/police distrust’, Dobrin (2017, p. 722) observes, ‘this could be a community activist’s opportunity to engage in the community/police process from both sides of the table’. The overall outcome of volunteers’ social engagement must not be underestimated as they can enhance police legitimacy, reduce fear of crime, and instil reassurance and optimism among citizens and law enforcement officers alike.

However, critics see this inspiring agenda merely as a vehicle for reducing the size of the state and cutting budget deficits in times of societal outcry for greater public safety. Indeed, as Undoo and Löfstrand have found in Sweden,

Citizens usually call for increased public safety and more uniformed police on the street. [...] What all this means, then, is that when the general public’s demands and expectations regarding the scope and effectiveness of the police function and operations are not met, voluntary policing is presented and introduced as a solution to this problem. (2018, pp. 2–3)

The use of police volunteers might be especially popular in times of financial crises, as they can be seen as a way to reduce the number of costly regular staff (Gravelle and Rogers 2009, Bullock and Leeney 2016). ‘The potential for cost-savings and operational efficiencies’, as Brudney and Kellough (2000, p. 121) put it, ‘may be the strongest reason for state agencies to consider introducing volunteers’. Police volunteers thus seem to embody a threat to ‘job security’, if political calls for ‘active citizenship’ in policing appear as austerity in disguise.

Therefore, police volunteers undeniably occupy a contested position within their forces because of occasionally tense relationships with paid colleagues and, as a result, institutional resistance: ‘members of the community are [...] not always regarded as natural partners of the police’ (Callender *et al.* 2018, p. 3). Police unions tend to consider volunteer schemes as a threat to job security, and paid officers may think that average citizens should not have easy access to sensitive information and intelligence (Gravelle and Rogers 2009, Bullock 2017). A further caveat is that volunteer police are, by their nature, unable to achieve the degree of experience that paid officers have, and this raises questions about their professional status and personal confidence (Wolf *et al.* 2016, Uhnoo and Löfstrand 2018). There are risks involved in ‘buying in’ police volunteers, because, despite their being trained and despite their wearing uniform, they are not regarded in the same way as fully-fledged officers. As such, ‘volunteers may face resentment from paid officers [...], risk isolation and have limited acceptance’ within their organisations (Dobrin 2017, p. 725). Opportunities to engage with regular colleagues on an everyday basis tend to increase their likelihood of recognition, as police volunteers may introduce innovative ways of working that deliver more efficient and effective police work.

### **Job satisfaction**

Little is known about the routine experiences and job satisfaction of police volunteers during their ‘tour of duty’. To counter this, Callender *et al.* (2018) have undertaken a national survey of Police

Support Volunteers (PSVs) in England and Wales with a sample of just over 1,000 (on a total of 8,000 PSVs) in 2016. Their findings indicate that PSV morale – defined as either positive or negative feelings about job satisfaction and their work environment – is closely linked to

feelings that they had supported their local police force, were being treated fairly as a volunteer, were appreciated for the time they give and impact they made, were creating a difference in their community, and that their efforts as a volunteer were recognised. (Callender *et al.* 2018, p. 9)

Callender *et al.* stress that the police should ensure a better ‘fit’ between volunteers and the wider organisation, ethos and activities of policing so that they might feel part of the team and make a genuine contribution. This conclusion echoes the research in the United States of Zhao *et al.* (2002, p. 56), that the ‘social efficacy’ – i.e. the willingness of people to face a challenge such as burglary or theft, and to act vigorously – is ‘higher among volunteers than among citizens generally’, because police volunteers are closely connected to a professional crime-fighting and law enforcement agency. When volunteer policing does not take place within an appreciative environment, opportunities to attract citizens into police work will probably be wasted.

In his paper on PSVs in Lancashire Constabulary, Millie arrives at a similar observation. PSVs find their job rewarding because of both ‘self-oriented’ (personal development) and ‘altruistic’ (give back time to society) motives, but also complain that the surrounding organisational infrastructure – i.e. receiving adequate police training and supervision – needs improvement. Somewhat isolated volunteers now feel that they ‘work *with* rather than *for* the police’ (2018, p. 11; italics in the original). In 2016, Wolf *et al.* sent a survey to 3,080 sheriffs about the utilisation of auxiliary police officers – reserve and voluntary – in the United States, which resulted in a total of 1,719 completed responses from voluntary law enforcement staff. Among other things, the authors concluded that a ‘sense of community’ is the most important reason for people to volunteer, combined with the idea that the sheriff’s department is allowing them ‘to grow and develop’. Again, there appears a strong correlation between job satisfaction and the self-understanding of the role and place of volunteers in the police organisation.

According to Wolf *et al.* (2017), police volunteers in both the US and the UK are generally confident in their ability to handle administrative tasks, but, at times, struggle with the skills necessary to complete forms and other paper work. As they suggest:

The fact that volunteer police do not spend as much time as their regular counterparts in the field may be a critical factor in why both US and UK volunteer police feel less confident in the administrative aspects of policing. Policing agencies are constantly upgrading and renewing forms, computer software, processes and routing of paper-work such that it can be extremely difficult even for a regular officer to keep up (Wolf *et al.* 2017, p. 102).

Here, we once more encounter the important limitation of police volunteers who only have time to do their job on a part-time basis. This gap between the motivation and the interests of voluntary officers on the one hand, and their disappointment about the police organisation as a whole on the other hand, requires better expectation management. Following Bullock and Leeney (2016, p. 500), ‘at the heart of debates about the recruitment, retention and regulation of special constables [and other types of police volunteers; RvS] would seem the question of balance’. Finding such a balance is crucial to developing effective strategies that align the part-time nature of police volunteers with the bureaucratic structures of a large professional organisation.

## Methodology

Our empirical research, carried out in 2015, rests on a mixed methods approach. Firstly, as part of a pilot study, we held 12 explorative interviews with experts from within the police and academia, and this helped focus our research lens. In addition, we conducted an online survey among 203 police volunteers in Amsterdam, the capital city of the Netherlands, about their background, motivation and job satisfaction. The response rate was 57% (118 respondents filled in the questions). We used simple descriptive statistics to analyse our survey data and conducted focus group sessions

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents across the Dutch police.

Police districts	Total		Support staff		Frontline staff	
	Interviews	Survey	Interviews	Survey	Interviews	Survey
Noord-Nederland	6	62	1	7	5	55
Oost-Nederland	3	90	1	3	2	87
Midden-Nederland	5	12	0	0	5	12
Noord-Holland	4	2	1	0	3	2
Amsterdam	3	118	1	94	2	24
Den Haag	6	7	1	0	5	7
Rotterdam	5	98	3	51	2	47
Zeeland/West-Brabant	3	2	0	0	3	2
Oost-Brabant	5	3	0	0	5	3
Limburg	3	36	1	0	2	36
Unknown	0	11	0	–	0	–
Total	43	441	9	155	34	275

with 12 volunteers and 10 police managers to reflect on the outcomes. Insights from the pilot study have been incorporated into our broader study as presented below.

Secondly, with the kind support of the Dutch Association of Police Volunteers (*Landelijke Organisatie van Politievrijwilligers*; LOPV), we carried out a nationwide survey among all police volunteers in the Netherlands. A total of 441 people completed an online form, including the 118 respondents from our initial explorative survey in Amsterdam. This number represents a response rate of about 14%, as measured against the total population of Dutch police volunteers. Frontline police volunteers ( $N = 275$ ) have a stronger representation in the survey than support police officers ( $N = 155$ ) and there are 11 respondents whose status is unknown. Again, descriptive statistics were used to summarise the sample data.

Thirdly, the LOPV supported a call for conducting in-depth interviews with police volunteers. More than 90 people responded. To ensure a proper spread across the country, and because of time and financial constraints, we selected for interview 43 police volunteers, 32 in a frontline role and 11 in a support function (Table 1). These interviews lasted from 30 minutes to well over one hour. We coded our qualitative material and grouped the findings into four key themes (policy-making processes, management and supervision, roles and activities, motivation and job satisfaction), which, amongst other issues, were presented in a Dutch practitioner-oriented report.

As Table 2 shows, an overwhelming majority of our respondents in the survey and in the interviews are male, middle-class, white and aged 40 or over. This corresponds with the demography of the Dutch police in general, and comparable figures can be found in Britain (Hieke 2018a). Volunteers in a support function, however, are more often female than male. Most of the police volunteers serve the force for 3 to 10 years although quite a few of them are active for more than 20 years.

Finally, we made appointments with the chairman and a board member of the LOPV, three spokesmen from police unions, and six other professionals within the police – policy advisors, police volunteer coordinators or managers, and a chief superintendent – to discuss our findings. All gave their views on the current situation regarding police volunteers. Topics included the added value of these volunteers, but also included issues such as the (perceived) displacement of paid staff by police volunteers.

**Table 2.** Demographics.

	Interviews ( $N = 43$ )	Survey ( $N = 441$ )
Male	35 (81%)	327 (74%)
Female	8 (19%)	114 (26%)
Age <25	2 (5%)	10 (2%)
Age 25–40	10 (23%)	84 (19%)
Age 40–60	21 (49%)	116 (26%)
Age >60	10 (23%)	231 (53%)

## Findings

This paragraph summarises our empirical findings and is organised as follows. The first section covers the policy attitude of the Dutch police towards volunteers. Subsequently, we examine the management and supervision of those volunteers, after which we determine their roles and activities. In addition, we explore the motivations of police volunteers: why do they engage in voluntary work? The final section describes how police volunteers perceive their position within the Dutch force and the level of appreciation that they receive.

### Policy making

In 2011, two years before the Dutch king proclaimed a ‘participatory society’ in which citizens should do their bit for the common good, the then minister of Justice and Public Safety announced that the number of police volunteers should increase from 3,500 to around 6,000. As of now, these targets are far from met. Decision-making processes move at a painstakingly slowly pace because of ongoing debates about the actual costs and benefits of a voluntary police staff. These debates were further hampered by a complex reorganisation of the Dutch police in 2012/2013. The reorganisation merged 25 regions into one single national force made up of 10 separate regional units (or subdivisions), and a national unit responsible for, among other things, patrolling public infrastructures such as motorways and railroads and fighting organised (cyber)crime. The regional units all have their own history, policies and structures in relation to volunteers and these cannot easily be aligned. For example, the Amsterdam police unit has invested significantly in volunteer support staff, while other units have attracted mostly (armed) volunteer frontline staff (also known as special constables) or lack a strong tradition of police volunteering in the first place. A further complication is that the Dutch force lacks a national volunteer coordinator responsible for streamlining logistics, management, budgets and facilities. The way in which regional police units support, finance and facilitate police volunteers therefore varies greatly.

However, underlying such organisational dilemmas, we witness a more fundamental normative argument about the pros and cons of police volunteers. Proponents praise their ability to (re)connect the police to local communities and improve general trust in the police. In their view, police volunteers shed a fresh light on routine police work and bring a range of life experiences that might be beneficial to paid staff. As a police manager told us:

The added value of police volunteers is to learn how to improve ourselves as a police organisation, and how to actively engage with citizens and their communities. (police volunteer manager #5)

Police volunteers are here depicted as ‘ambassadors’ of the police who tell constructive stories about what is going on within the organisation and are open to questions from the public. This optimistic reading of their work resonates strongly with the high hopes for police volunteers in the United States, for instance. According to Dobrin (2017, p. 724), ‘volunteers are people who come directly from the community, who are not ensconced into the subculture of policing, and impact the way the police see the community and how the community sees the police’. Nevertheless, a Dutch police union spokesman remained sceptical about the assumed positive social influence of police volunteers:

There are only 3,500 police volunteers who serve 17 million Dutchmen. This is too small a number to make a difference. Besides, the other 60,000 paid police officers are also good ambassadors. It is quite odd to attribute the police’s PR function to police volunteers, isn’t it? (police union #3)

His scepticism is fuelled by alleged cost savings behind the use of police volunteers, which ‘could stir up labour issues with unions that represent paid officers or create other forms of hostility from paid officers who think they are financially hurt by the volunteers’ (Dobrin and Wolf 2016, p. 224).

Moreover, volunteers may also drive out other forms of paid labour in additional cost saving. As a police union spokesman said:

It is not right if you use 10 police volunteers to clean the office. The government should pay those people. (police union #2)

A further concern is that the original intentions of police volunteer programmes might slowly transform into organising social activities for the long-term unemployed, and 'this is certainly not a police task' (police union #1). Yet, during our interviews, police force staff and union spokespersons also saw the value of police volunteers in times of austerity, due to growing public demands on law enforcement and crime fighting capacities: 'we are not against volunteers, [...] but the police should better think through how to deploy them, and what the possible risks are' (police union #2). With this, it must not be forgotten that the hiring of police volunteers includes necessary investment for training, clothing, equipment, and so on. Deploying these volunteers certainly has a cost.

What is lacking, as a result of the byzantine structures surrounding the stakeholders that make policy on police volunteering, is a clear vision of the future of police volunteers in the Netherlands. Apart from the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, the management board of the Dutch Police, and the LOPV, there are several policy-making and advisory bodies active at national and regional police levels, not to forget the three police unions that impact on the decision-making process. These actors disagree about the most optimal positioning of police volunteers vis-à-vis paid staff. For example, should voluntary police officers be limited to support functions or should there be more investment in fully-fledged 'specials'? In practice, opportunities for training and education have been limited over the past few years, thanks to both budgetary constraints and to the wish to lower the entrance threshold for newcomers. Furthermore, as Wolf *et al.* (2016) found in the United States, policy on remuneration, including reimbursement of expenses or minimal pay for service, varies across the Dutch police force. This is another indication of the complications surrounding the use of police volunteers and of what can potentially cause dissatisfaction among them.

Despite flashy recruitment campaigns aimed at potential police volunteers, currently many newcomers end up as support staff providing back-office functions or as unarmed frontline staff with very limited powers. Critics fear that measures taken will result in a decline in the number of cadets, because the roles and tasks of police volunteers increasingly appear less attractive to people. In short, policy making aimed at recruiting and retaining Dutch police volunteers is not without problems due to the many stakeholders (police leaders, the national government, various unions, the LOPV, etc.), a lack of overall oversight and coordination, and disagreement about the real value of police volunteers to contemporary policing. A clear vision on the future of voluntary police officers in the Netherlands remains absent.

### **Management and supervision**

The placement of volunteers in the police organisation deserves proper management and supervision. As Bullock (2017, p. 348) stresses: 'it is generally acknowledged that a paid volunteer or coordinator is essential to facilitate the development of successful programmes within public (and other) sector organisations'. If public organisations want to attract and retain volunteers successfully, it is vital to stimulate a positive working climate and maximise the opportunities afforded by their skills, knowledge and activities (Gaston and Alexander 2001). Therefore, most of the ten regional police units in the Netherlands have set up regional divisions that concentrate on recruitment, manage logistics, coach supervisors and volunteers, and generate monthly work schedules. Our respondents have mixed opinions on these divisions. Some praise the efficiency of having one central point of contact and the support they get, while others struggle with tensions between central and day-to-day management. It is not always clear who is responsible for what. As a police manager put it:

We are now responsible for the overall management of 500 police volunteers in the north of the Netherlands. That is too many to handle. [...] At the same time, in practice, responsibilities are also devolved to the managers of local police stations that employ volunteers. They quite often have a significant say in how volunteers are managed and supervised on a daily basis, which raises the question about who should do what. (police manager #2)

And from a police volunteer's perspective:

There should be a key contact person [...] who holds responsibility for our deployment and personal development, just for everything. This structure is too fragmented and diffuse. (police volunteer #20; SC)

Although over the past few years the Dutch police have seen a centralisation of policy and management structures, most volunteers prefer a decentralised model that is easily accessible to them.

In addition, about 20% of our police volunteers display dissatisfaction about the way their supervisors support them. They experience a lack of interest and a lack of regular contact, or complain about the high turnover of coordinators and managers: 'once things are settled, a new person arrives, and it starts all over again' (police volunteer #30; SC). Another issue is the absence of proper facilitation compared to regular police officers, partly because volunteers work flexible and limited hours. Over half of the volunteers in our study think that their working environment is not very well organised. They say it is devoid of appropriate working spaces, dressing rooms, vehicles, and proper communication devices such as police radios:

We really had to lobby over the past three months to make sure that facility management said: 'yes, you are right: you need to have a new uniform'. (police volunteer #28; PSV)

On the other hand, volunteers are quite positive about their job – especially those with long experience within the police who report that their supervision and management has been improved since they joined the force. For example, a number of local police departments have started to organise monthly consultations for their volunteers. The content of these consultations differs: they may have the character of a work meeting, but there is also room for discussing bottlenecks or learning more about new legislation, computer systems or specific topics such as fireworks. The volunteers appreciate such meetings, because they are seen and listened to and receive information that is meaningful in their job. Overall, it seems that the management and supervision of Dutch police volunteers varies significantly throughout the organisation, resulting in mixed opinions about the support and appreciation they receive. The quality of supervision depends on the histories and organisation of regional police units, but the personal will and skill of volunteer managers can make a difference too.

### **Roles and activities**

As touched upon earlier, police volunteers in the Netherlands can be divided into special constables and support officers. However, from her empirical research about Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) in England and Wales, Bullock concludes that distinctions between 'frontline' and 'back office' police work are disingenuous at the point of both principle and practice: 'it is clear that PSVs are conducting roles that go well to the heart of what is conventionally understood as "frontline" policing' (2017, p. 345). A similar blurring of boundaries is apparent in the Netherlands. In addition to frontline police volunteers, support volunteers carry out non-uniformed functions such as form filling, but they may also be involved in preventive and regulative roles on the streets.

Frontline police volunteers wear the same uniforms as their paid colleagues, the majority of them holding the rank of unarmed 'police patroller' (*politie-surveillant*). Some of those special constables have climbed to the rank of police officer and even police sergeant, which means they are authorised to carry a firearm. Most (unarmed) frontline police volunteers are usually involved in patrolling public streets and squares, shopping centres, and nightlife districts, although traffic enforcement is another area in which they can be active. Others assist bailiffs in collecting unpaid fines, run criminal background checks for firearm permit applications, or assist detainee transportation. However, there

still is consensus about what the limitations of special constables are. Most respondents agree that they are not suitable for specialised arrest teams and vice squads, which require much training, experience and 24/7 availability.

Dutch Police Support Volunteers can do a variety of jobs ranging from simple administrative tasks to cleaning police vehicles. Indeed, 'it seemed the only limitation on what PSVs could do was their lack of police power' (Millie 2018, p. 4). The Amsterdam police unit, in particular, deploys hosts and hostesses who greet visitors at the reception desks of the local police stations. Yet, in other regional units, PSVs also perform tasks that resemble frontline work such as delivering anti-burglary programmes, keeping an eye on crowded places, warning visitors about pick-pockets, conducting alcohol controls to prevent drunk driving, and assisting detectives in the field. It is therefore unsurprising that the status of police volunteers can confuse regular police colleagues and citizens alike. In short, the distinction between special constables and PSVs is less clear-cut than it first appears.

### Motivations

What motivates an individual to join up as a police volunteer? Table 3 demonstrates that many of our respondents decided to join the force for social or altruistic reasons. Contributing to their communities and improving public safety are among the most frequently mentioned motives:

I want to do something useful for society (volunteer #20; SC); voluntary work is a kind of obligation to contribute to society. (police volunteer #15; PSV)

I don't do this work not for myself, I am here for the police and for society. (police volunteer # 18; PSV)

Well, the ways how people go along with each other today ... I hope that I can improve this a little bit. (police volunteer #33; SC)

These respondents rejected a role on the side lines and instead acted on their belief that they could make a difference. This is in line with Wolf *et al.*'s (2016, p. 459) finding that 'a sense of community involvement was the main reason that they served as a volunteer law enforcement officer'. Another respondent described his enthusiasm in terms of gaining more influence over crime reduction strategies: 'I can actively do something about security problems myself. That is my motive' (police volunteer #26; SC). 'Helping people' and 'service delivery to citizens' are also among the motives given by a large group of respondents.

While social involvement is a central motive for taking up voluntary work, more individually-oriented motives such as 'personal growth', 'learning new things', and 'doing fun work' also score highly among our respondents: 'other people have football for their hobby, but we go on patrol. We do nice things there' (police volunteer #38; SC). In a few instances unemployed interviewees admitted that their voluntary work was not so much intrinsically motivated, but contributed to 'having something to do, [...] having a day rhythm, a routine, in life' (police volunteer #14; PSV). Furthermore, volunteers mentioned the opportunity to get to know the police 'from inside' and have a look 'behind the scenes'. As an organisation, the police force is attractive:

**Table 3.** Most-mentioned reasons to volunteer ( $N = 441$ ).

	Number	% agreed
I help other people	414	94
I do nice and interesting work	409	93
I learn new things	403	91
I spend my time usefully	392	89
I positively contribute to society	388	88
I support important police tasks	381	86
I feel useful	371	84
I work together with a police team	359	81
I am able to improve my own qualities	356	81

**Table 4.** Least-mentioned reasons to volunteer ( $N = 441$ ).

	Number	% agreed
I can make new friends	129	29%
I improve my chances of getting a paid job	97	22%
I can build business contacts	90	20%
I can forget my own sorrows	65	15%
I feel less lonely	38	9%

We carry out an enormous variety of activities. One moment, you are confronted with a person on drugs, and the other moment you help an elderly casualty of robbery. (police volunteer # 4; SC)

The police are a huge organisation, and having a background in organisational studies, this appeals to me. It is interesting to know how it all works'. (police volunteer #27; PSV)

Infrequent mention is made of social reasons ('meeting new friends') as a motive for serving the police (29%). Nor are job opportunities a primary motive: only 22% of respondents say they hope that opting for voluntary work will get them paid job later (Table 4).

Overall, and in line with previous publications in England and Wales (Hieke 2018b, Millie 2018), police volunteers in the Netherlands display a combination of social (or altruistic) motivations, self-oriented reasons and a general interest in the police to explain their willingness to work without pay. Career-driven motives rank lower within the Dutch voluntary force than in other studies.

### **Acceptance by paid colleagues**

During our interviews, we asked police volunteers about their acceptance by paid colleagues. As Johnston (2003, p. 200) writes, 'far from being a site of exclusive consent and cooperation, [...] the [police extended] family may also be a source of conflict and division'. For example, police volunteers were initially depicted as 'wannabe coppers' and, as a result, they have struggled for inclusion and legitimation. What is more, 'threat to job security is a very clear reason why there might be resistance to the introduction of PSVs' (Bullock 2017, p. 351), and frontline police volunteers. Some older respondents report this problem as obsolete, yet there are still signs of negative attitudes towards volunteering in a police context. The previously-mentioned reservation about police volunteering on the part of the unions is likely to be impacted by the current context of political urgency for organisational reform and budget constraints, even without outright financial downturn.

Acceptance and integration of volunteers within the Dutch police varies across the organisation. Most of the volunteers feel they are a valued member of a team, although this might be the outcome of a longer process of proving to regular officers that they 'add value':

Well, as a volunteer, I certainly experience much collegiality, almost camaraderie. We are very focused on each other, even display some hostility to the outside world. [...] So yes, this is a group culture that you need to adapt and conform to, which happens almost automatically. Once you are in, it cannot go wrong anymore. (police volunteer #20; SC)

Indeed, if one thing stands out in our research it is that Dutch police volunteers were generally satisfied with the job. When asked to grade their voluntary work, most respondents came up with an A-rating. Respondents appeared most satisfied when allowed to take on the activities they liked. Also, feelings of 'belonging to' and 'being part of' the police team positively influence their job satisfaction. As Callender *et al.* write, 'high morale is typified by positive feelings and satisfaction with co-workers and how work is conducted' (2018, p. 4). Our study demonstrates that police volunteers are usually (very) satisfied with the working climate and the way they are treated by individual colleagues (Table 5). Despite a handful of negative comments about a lack of appreciation, most respondents experience confirmation from paid colleagues, which fuels their passion for police work.

But this is only part of the story. The fuller picture indicates that police volunteers also have significant doubts about the larger instructional context: 'I give an A for my own working experience, but the police as a whole deserves an E-minus, I perhaps even assigned an F-grade' (police volunteer #28;

**Table 5.** Issues appreciated by police volunteers ( $N = 441$ ).

	Number	% agreed
The working climate of my unit	399	90%
My relationship with paid colleagues	385	87%
The support I receive during my work	371	84%
The opportunity to exchange thoughts with paid colleagues	356	81%
The match between expectations, in-take and the actual job	198	45%
The opportunity to receive training and education	178	40%
The internal communication and organisation of police volunteers' added value	173	39%
The external communication and organisation of police volunteers' added value	169	38%

PSV). Sources of dissatisfaction include the current lack of opportunities for education and training for those who need it:

Due to new [i.e. lower] training standards and, accordingly, restricted police powers, I am unable to fulfil all tasks previously assigned to me. (police volunteer #4; SC)

Promises made during the recruitment sessions don't match reality. (police volunteer #7; SC)

Furthermore, lingering confusion about what police volunteers are (not) allowed to do, and how to match them to specific functions, along with failing internal communications and logistics regarding their practical requirements (uniforms, working space, equipment, and the like), adversely affects the volunteer experience. Respondents complained about an inadequate 'management structure' within the police, which produced comment that 'we are just volunteers' (police volunteer #11; SC). In summary, police volunteers may feel somewhat unloved by the police organisation as a whole. In this context, quite significant regional and local disparities in how well volunteers are positioned within the force are important.

## Conclusion and discussion

Even with the origins of the Dutch police volunteers dating back as far as 1948, they continue to be peculiar characters within the force. Since their transformation from reserve to voluntary forces in 1993, they have ranked low on the organisation's agenda and have received little priority from policy makers. In fact, those policies implemented so far have been subject to dispute because of ongoing argument about the costs and benefits of police volunteers. Proponents widely praise their unique expertise and skills, their 'ambassadorship' in local communities, and the (re)building of police-citizen ties, whereas opponents view police volunteers as an unjust solution to economic downturn, criticise their inevitable lack of all-round experience, and point to the potential risks of conflict, resistance and poor integration with paid colleagues.

Moreover, even though the Dutch police have completed a move towards centralisation in 2013, its ten regional units still retain their own histories of volunteer policing, and this creates a rather fractured policy landscape which is difficult to align. Tensions arising from these histories trickle down to the management and supervision of police volunteers throughout the Netherlands. Police units and police stations might be open, welcoming and well-equipped for the volunteers' needs, but this is not necessarily so. As a result of the latter, respondents complain about logistical issues, unclear coordination structures, mismatches between job expectations and everyday reality, limited training opportunities, and confusion about the positions and added value of police volunteers. Their stories indicate that more attention should be given to the place of volunteers within the Dutch police, although, again, the picture differs across the organisation.

Police volunteers in the Netherlands can be split into two groups: 'frontline' officers (or 'special constables') and 'support' officers (or PSVs). The roles, activities and appearances of the first group resemble those of regular police staff; some 'frontline' volunteers are even vested with the authority to carry a firearm. Volunteers in support functions deliver back-office work, educate citizens about crime prevention, work at the front desk of a police station, assist with the maintenance and

repair of police vehicles and are busy with a range of other things. Most respondents give remarkably high scores to job satisfaction. Overall, both frontline and support police volunteers are satisfied with the working climate, their relationships with paid colleagues and the personal guidance they receive. They are also keen to help others, positively contribute to their communities, fulfil an interesting job, and invest in their own individual development. However, there is a simmering unease, and the majority of respondents opined that the organisation at large does not serve their interests very well. This mood can be explained by the described failure to enthusiastically embrace, stimulate, and cherish police volunteers in the Netherlands.

In summary, our results show that, on the level of individual police volunteers, most of them choose to undertake voluntary work because they want to do something worthwhile for society. In addition, volunteering helps respondents to improve personal skills and create pleasant connections with regular police colleagues. Many are positive about these things. Yet, at the same time, they experience deep uncertainty about their position within the force. The Dutch police as an institution tends to undervalue and neglect the work of police volunteers, not least because of slow policy-making processes, an unclear vision about the future of volunteer policing and distrust over the unwanted substitution of salaried work by voluntary work.

Our conclusions about volunteer police in the Netherlands by and large confirm evidence about their paradoxical position in the UK (Bullock and Leeney 2016, Bullock 2017, Bullock and Millie 2018, Millie 2018) and in the US (Dobrin and Wolf 2016, Dobrin 2017). As in these countries, Dutch police volunteers, special constables in particular, build on a long history, but have been somewhat overlooked. The need for those volunteers must be understood in the larger socio-political context of 'responsibilising' citizens, but they also struggle with opposition from police unions that accuse them of threatening regular jobs. Volunteers are highly motivated to contribute to police work and to society at large, but training, supervision and management from the police itself require improvement. Special constables and police support volunteers can perform many duties and roles, but their mutual relationship and place in the police organisation are constantly disputed. In other words: despite international praise and increasing scholarly attention to volunteer police, their future in the plural policing family is far from certain.

That said, this paper has a few limitations that offer opportunities for further investigation. Firstly, there is an urgency to draw more detailed comparisons between 'specials' and PSVs. Although there seems much overlap in terms of motivation and satisfaction, attending to variations in backgrounds, skills and motivations can help inform a better strategic planning towards the recruitment and retention of volunteer police constables. Secondly, this paper has sought to interpret empirical finding from the Netherlands in light of the Anglo-Saxon literature. Yet, and in spite of important parallels we found, it is recommended that more systematic cross-national research on the peculiarities of volunteer policing in the Netherlands, the UK, the US, and elsewhere be undertaken. Special constables, PSVs, police reserves and police auxiliary units operate around the world, but do so under divergent political, historical, judicial and economic conditions.

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