Abstract police organisations: distantiation, decontextualisation and digitalisation.

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Over the past years the police in many Western European countries have witnessed a range of important changes. These changes concern a complex of highly diverging aspects of the police organisation. This is probably one of the reasons why these changes were often not perceived as interrelated and why they were often not recognised as resulting in a fundamentally different kind of organisation. To sum up very briefly: both in their internal and external relations, the police have become more at a distance, more impersonal and formal, less direct, and more decontextualised. The police have also become more dependent on 'system knowledge', framed within the logics and categorisations of digitalised data systems (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). To gain a better understanding of these fundamental changes to the police, we introduced a new concept in *The Police Journal* in 2019 that we called the Abstract Police (Terpstra, Fyfe & Salet, 2019).

In this paper, we first deal with the context of discovery of this concept and with the question of why a new concept was needed. Next we concentrate on the main outlines of this concept, the changes over the past years in the internal and external relations of the police and how these relations have made the police more abstract. Then we try to understand the main drivers and forces that have contributed to this shift to an increasingly abstract police organisation. Finally, in this paper we deal with some new questions and comments that have

been raised in debates about this concept. In this way we hope to promote further debate on this topic and stimulate more research that will bring greater light on the ongoing changes in police and policing. We feel that this is necessary, because too often it is assumed that police, police culture and police work have remained essentially the same since the classic studies about the police in the 1960s and 1970s. However, we feel that there is not only continuity in the police, but also fundamental change taking place (Terpstra & Salet, 2019; see also Sklansky, 2006). We feel that the notion of abstract police may be helpful to better understand these ongoing changes and the complex relations between change and continuity in the police.

The context of discovery

The concept of the Abstract Police was developed in several studies that we did on the police and criminal justice in both the Netherlands and Scotland over the past few years (Fyfe, 2018; Hail, 2016; Salet & Terpstra, 2020; SIPR, WWS and Scotcen, 2017a and 2017b; Terpstra et al., 2016; Terpstra, 2018; Terpstra & Fyfe, 2013, 2015, 2019). Before we deal with the concept of the abstract police in more detail, we will briefly sketch two cases that made us aware of the need for a new concept to better understand the important changes that have been going on in the police. At first sight, these examples may look very different and unrelated. However, later on in this chapter, it will become clear that in fact the serious challenges in the police exemplified by these two cases illustrate a set of common underlying processes and patterns.

The client and the computer screen

It must have been in late 2014, when two of us were doing fieldwork for our study on what is called ASAP (Salet & Terpstra, 2020), a multi-agency network in the Netherlands for the processing of cases of high volume crime. Several agencies cooperate in these local security networks, such as the police, the public prosecution agency, Child Welfare, the

Probation Service and Victim Support. We visited one of the offices of ASAP. In this building a large number of officers of these agencies had their work place. Here they were cooperating in the processing of cases of petty crime. To promote the communication and cooperation between these officers with very different professional and organisational backgrounds, it was decided that they should be working in one large room in this building.

It was the first day of our field work, so we introduced ourselves to all the officers working here. We also asked them individually about their work, what they exactly did, how they cooperated, and what their main experiences were. One of the persons that we talked with, was a Victim Support Officer, a woman of about 30 years. When we talked with her, something happened, that at first surprised us very much, but that later on proved to be very important for raising our awareness of what we would later call abstractness. However, at that time we did not really understand what was happening.

At first we asked this Victim Support Officer if she could explain to us the work that she was doing. However, it proved that she could only explain this by showing us on her computer screen what she was doing. She said: '*For every case that I work on, I open up a file on my computer screen. It contains a menu with a number of questions that I have to answer, especially about the loss suffered by the victim and the compensation that may be asked from the offender. I do this by ticking off the relevant boxes. When I have answered all the questions about the case on my screen, I am ready. Next I can send the file to one of the other officers working here.*' When we asked her if she knew how victims experienced her work, she became a bit confused and seemed to be surprised by the question. She said that she had never thought about that question before. In fact, she had never met a victim in person and did not have any idea about how victims felt about what she did. The only information she had about the victims, was the information she had from her computer system.

After our visit to this office building, for some days we were wondering how to understand what this woman told us. The problem was certainly not that this woman could only do very simple work or that she was not able to reflect about this. Given her position as a victim support officer, she probably had a bachelor degree in social work.

Murder of a nurse in a hospital parking area

The second case concerns a terrible, dramatic incident that happened in the Dutch medium-sized city of Waalwijk on 10 August 2015. A woman aged 28 years, named Linda van der Giessen, was killed in the parking area of the hospital where she worked as a nurse. In the days following this incident it emerged that she was killed by her ex-partner. An independent committee investigated this case (Commissie Eenhoorn, 2016). The report of the committee showed that in the weeks before her death, Linda had reported several times to the police that she felt very threatened by her ex-partner, that he was stalking her and that he had bought a gun. In fact, during the weeks before she died, she had talked with at least seven different police officers about being seriously threatened. Still the police had done nothing to protect this woman against the threats and stalking of her ex-partner.

The committee concluded that the police should have paid more attention to the case and should have intervened with more urgency. The problems were caused by the highly 'complex, bureaucratic and fragmented work processes' and information systems of the police. Police officers seemed to be caught in 'systemic communication' and were mainly focused on following criminal law procedures. In general, the police showed too much trust in the effectiveness of IT systems and IT communication. As a result, it looked as if police officers felt insufficient responsibility for the case and for the protection of this woman (Commissie Eenhoorn, 2016: 20-21).

The search for an adequate concept

These two incidents (as well as many others) raised the question: what happened here? Why did the police fail to respond in an adequate way? How can we understand this? Is this just a matter of bureaucracy, of red tape, of a cynical police culture, or should these incidents be seen as new examples of the perverse effects of the managerialisation of the police (to mention just a few of the common explanations of police failure and shortcomings)? Although each of these concepts is still very useful, we believe that these concepts can only offer partial explanations of these problematic situations existing within contemporary police organisations. What is maybe even more important, all of these concepts do not recognise sufficiently the fundamental changes of the police over the past years. That also implies that they may exaggerate the degree of continuity in the police.

We started to realise that 'something new' has been going on in contemporary police organisations, with fundamental consequences for both the internal, and the external relations of the police. Comparative studies about the consequences of the 2013 police reforms in Scotland and the Netherlands showed that the police had become more at a distance, more impersonal, more formal, less direct and more decontextualised. The police have also become less dependent on the traditional personal knowledge of officers, as this is increasingly being replaced by system knowledge and IT-systems. Relations, both between police officers and between the police and citizens, have become more impersonal and at a distance, a change that is in sharp contrast to the dominance of the traditional direct and personal relations in and outside the police organisation. Although these changes were strongly promoted by these police reforms, it is not impossible that before 2013 at least some of them could already have been found in a more rudimentary form.

To understand this complex of changes and to be able to understand their interrelatedness, we thought it necessary to introduce a new concept: the Abstract Police. Although at first, a main reason to develop this concept was to understand the main (unintended) outcomes of the Scottish and Dutch 2013 police reforms, we believe that the rise of a more abstract police is not limited to these two countries. The abstract police are also a consequence of long-term social developments, of a process of late or hyper-modernisation if you wish, such as the increasing globalisation, individualisation, the disembedding of social institutions (Giddens, 1990 and 1991) and the increasing impact of digitalisation on everyday social relations and practices (Turkle, 2015).

The 'abstract police' should be understood as an ideal-typical concept (Weber, 1922). Ideal types (sometimes called pure types) are abstractions that emphasise certain aspects of social reality. They provide an analytical perspective to better understand specific elements of reality, such as certain important developments of the contemporary police. To evaluate ideal types, the relevant question is not whether the concept is (completely) 'true', but if it is helpful to better describe and understand important developments and to create adequate interpretations of important empirical findings that until then could not be understood satisfactorily. In this way, the ideal type is also meant to raise a critical attention for certain developments in the police that until now were not in the public awareness. The concept of the abstract police should be helpful to raise the public, political and professional debate about the future of police organisations.

The abstract police: changing internal and external relations

The increasingly abstract character of the police refers to changes over the past years in both the internal, and the external relations of the police. Both of these relations have become more at a distance, more impersonal and formal, and communication has become less

direct, in other words have become more abstract.[2] In certain respects, the increasing importance of the abstractness of the police can be compared with a process of de-humanisation, not in the meaning that all police officers are now 'less humane or uncaring', but 'that the human is less in the foreground of the actual situation' (Heintschel von Heinegg, Frau & Singer, 2018: 4). However, as the example of the murder on the Dutch nurse in August 2015 shows, an increasingly abstract police organisation runs the risk of becoming less caring and less oriented to helping vulnerable persons.

It is important to realise that the rise of an increasingly abstract police organisation can also have 'disruptive' effects (Allwood, 2017). This means that it may be disruptive for former, traditional relations and practices that were more personal, direct, informal and contextualised. As a result, the rise of the abstract police may be felt as a loss of the former traditional and more personal relations and ways of doing, but it may also create conflicts with those (within and outside the police) who try to continue the traditional, less abstract relations and practices.

In the following sections we will deal with the increasingly abstract nature of both the internal and the external relations of the police. This analysis is largely based on our comparative studies on the implementation and (local) effects of the Scottish and Dutch police reforms in 2013 (Terpstra & Fyfe, 2013; 2015; 2019).

Internal relations

The first important aspect of the increasing abstractness of the police can be found in the changing internal relations of the police services. Both the Scottish and the Dutch police reforms of 2013 have resulted in a considerable scale enlargement and in highly centralised

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[2] In this context the word abstract is used not in the intellectual, but in the social meaning: social relations and practices are taken from the direct, face-to-face, local and personal context, with a reduction of the role of the human individual, more or less replaced by systems, system knowledge, communication at a distance, etc.

organisations with a focus on efficiency and control. For instance, in the Netherlands much larger local police teams and working areas were introduced. In the past a local police team had about 30-40 members. Nowadays a local team may have between 90 and 220 members. This has a negative impact om the traditional close relations that police officers used to have. Police officers now do not know all their team members anymore, something that would have been unimaginable in the past (Terpstra, 2018). In Scotland, the creation of national police in 2013 has also led to a fundamental configuration of local policing centered around the '3 Rs'. These are the Reduction in the number of civilian staff at a local level, requiring police officers to undertake more 'back office' functions; the Redeployment of local police officers to regional and national specialist units without being replaced in local communities; and the Restructuring of beat areas to create larger geographical territories over which officers must work (SIPR et al, 2017a).

The relations between police officers have also changed as a result of formalisation and increasing horizontal and vertical fragmentation of the police. For instance, in the past Dutch community police officers could largely decide on their own how to do their job. If they needed some assistance from colleagues, they just asked them informally in the canteen or at the coffee machine. Nowadays they have to follow detailed procedures to involve their colleagues. A community officer must now make a so-called neighbourhood assignment in a special computer program and format. This assignment will be assessed by a coordinating officer, who will decide if it will be given to patrol officers. Feedback is not given directly to the community officer, but is communicated by the same computer program (Terpstra, 2018).

One of the main objectives of the Scottish police reform was to create specialist units at the national level. Although this may have considerable benefits, it also contributed to a new organisational fragmentation (Giacomantonio, 2015), problems of coordination, and more distance between local officers and specialists (Fyfe, 2018; Hail, 2016). Studies, in both

in Scotland and the Netherlands, found a much larger distance between local officers and the centralised contact centres. The staff at the new contact centres often proved to have a lack of local knowledge and understanding of the problems and priorities of communities, and were under pressure to resolve calls as quickly as possible so that they were always available to take the next call. In some cases, the problems of call handling in contact centres had tragic consequences, including the delay in a police response to reports that a car had crashed off the motorway in which both the driver and passenger were killed (SIPR, What Works Scotland and ScotCen, 2017a; HMICS, 2015).

Not only have the relations between local operational police officers changed, but also the relations with senior officers. The scale enlargement of the local teams, especially in the Netherlands, has meant that senior officers are more at a distance. Direct and personal relations between senior and rank-and-file officers have diminished. Scottish officers also often feel that they now have less access and interaction with senior officers (SIPR, WWS & ScotCen, 2017a). Dutch officers often complain that they cannot approach their chiefs anymore for all kinds of questions, which was quite normal before the reform. Communication by senior officers is increasingly dependent on e-mail and computer systems (Terpstra, 2018). Dutch officers often call this 'management by e-mail'.

Several studies showed that relations in the contemporary Scottish and Dutch police differ strongly from the traditional police cultures with their strong emphasis on solidarity, feelings of togetherness with colleagues and social cohesion that often used to dominate local police teams (Loftus, 2009; Cockcroft, 2013; Terpstra & Schaap, 2013; Terpstra et al., 2016). The gap between street cops and management cops (Reuss-Ianni, 1983) may even become greater (Hail, 2016).

External relations

The increasing abstractness of the police can also be found in their external relations. Both in Scotland and the Netherlands, the transition to national police systems has resulted in a greater distance between the police and local communities. Several factors have contributed to this, such as the closure of large numbers of police stations (both in rural and urban areas) and the reduction of opening hours. Many local officers feel that there is a loss of local orientation and local knowledge of the police. In Scotland the loss of small and personal beats has contributed to a perceived loss of moral ownership and responsibility of local officers for their areas (Hail, 2016).

The increased distance between the police and the general audience can be illustrated by a new model of service provision of the Dutch National Police. According to this so-called Multi-Channel Model, citizens can use different channels to contact the police for information or to report a crime: by internet, phone, teleservice, a visit to the police station, or by meeting a police officer at home. The model suggests that citizens as 'customers' of the police can choose between different channels. However, this model is primarily a way for the police to manage their workload (Welch et al., 2004). In practice, in most cases, citizens are supposed to use the internet. Many of the citizens who come spontaneously to the police station, are refused and told that they should make an appointment online. The system does not take into account that many victims of crime have the emotional need to tell their story in person and do not want to use the internet or the teleservice system. Many police officers note that this model has created a larger distance between the police and citizens, especially for those who lack relevant computer skills. As a result, many police officers feel that since the introduction of this service model, the police receive less information (Terpstra et al., 2016; Terpstra, 2018).

In addition to the changes in the relations of the police with citizens, there have also been important changes in the relations with partner agencies. Scottish studies showed that, as a consequence of the initial centralisation of the police, local partnerships have deteriorated. The communication and exchange of information with partners has also declined (Hail, 2016; SIPR, WWS & ScotCen, 2017a). In the Netherlands, relations between cooperating agencies are now often more remote, formal, and dependent on communication by e-mail and computer systems (Terpstra et al., 2016). As a result, officers from partner agencies often do not know each other anymore in person. ASAP, a multi-agency approach operating in the whole country for the management of cases of high volume crime, is now dependent on highly standardised work processes. The cooperation between the partner agencies in this network was shifted from the local level to much higher organisational levels (Salet & Terpstra, 2020). As a result, personal trust, as one of the main factors contributing to inter-organisational cooperation in the past, has been decreasing.

Main drivers and forces

Most of the empirical information in our analysis refers to the local impact of the 2013 police reforms in Scotland and the Netherlands. However, we assume that the shift to a more abstract police is not bound to these two countries or to countries with comparable police reforms. It can be expected that the 2013 police reforms in these two countries made the contours of abstract character even more prominent and visible than elsewhere. We also assume that now or in the near future the transition to more abstract police organisations can also be found in other Western European countries, although probably with all kinds of international differences. This assumption follows from our analysis of the main drivers and forces that are relevant to understand the rise of abstract police. Many of these factors and circumstances are not unique for the police reforms in Scotland and the Netherlands. On the contrary, the growth of an increasingly abstract police must be understood as closely related

to more general social developments and fundamental changes in our societies over the past decades.

To understand the increasingly abstract character of the police, not only are the organisational changes mentioned before (such as scale enlargement and standardisation) relevant, but also several other drivers and forces, such as digitalisation and changing views on police organisations and police work. In addition, the process of increasing abstractness can also be understood as the outcome of long-term social processes of rationalisation in times of late or hyper modernity. We will briefly sketch the main outlines of each of these main drivers.

Police services, just like most other organisations, have become more dependent on digital devices and systems. This has resulted in important changes in relations, work processes, and practices of the police. One of these changes has been the shift from the traditional street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980), first to a screen-level bureaucracy, and next to a system-level bureaucracy (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Buffat, 2015; Reddick, 2005). In the traditional street-level bureaucracy, officers used to have much discretion and have direct relations with citizens. In the first stages of digitalisation, the relations between police officers and citizens became increasingly mediated by the computer screen. In the past, police officers had much discretion in their direct interactions with citizens. With the shift to a system-level bureaucracy, citizens who want to report a crime to the police, generally only have to deal with the computer (system). For instance, in the Dutch Multi Channel service model, there should be less personal contact, except in very urgent cases. This has reduced direct and personal communication (Tollenaar, 2014).

The processes of digitalisation have also contributed to new forms of autonomy and dependency of police officers. On the one hand, the police have become more dependent on

'system information'. This implies that the information used by the police has become more dependent on the frames and categories of computer systems (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). As a result, the direct and often personal knowledge of police officers has become less important. It may enlarge the risk that the police will not be able to escape the (ir)rationality of computer systems: the well-known danger of 'the computer says so'. On the other hand, police officers working on the streets, have now direct access to all kinds of system information: they can always check their mobile device or on-board computer in the patrol car. Compared with the past, they are now less dependent on information delivered by the police dispatcher or the control room. However, the use and availability of mobile devices creates a much more detailed system of internal control and surveillance. With every move they make and every time they look for information on their mobile device, the street officers create new information (often without being aware) that makes it easier to find out where they have been and what they have done (Ferguson, 2017: 143-166; see for comparable goals of police technologies: Williams, 2014).

In the Dutch local police teams, the relations of police officers with their colleagues, but also with their supervisors have also changed because communication by internet and email has often replaced the direct and personal interaction (Terpstra et al., 2016). The strong emphasis on performance management by means of decontextualised universal targets, quantitative data, and computer system also contributes to less direct and personal relationships between officers and their supervisor. These processes can also disrupt (Allwood, 2017) both the traditional types of police information (seen as invalid or unreliable now), and the traditional informal relations in the police (now defined as undermining control and efficiency).

The increasingly abstract character of the police can also be seen as a (partially unintended) outcome of changing views on police work and police organisations over the past

two decades. In most Western European countries since the 1990s, the New Public Management has had a huge impact on the police. Many measures to promote the economy, effectiveness, and efficiency of the police have increased the abstractness of this organisation, such as the closure of police stations, the reduction of opening hours, a stronger reliance on IT, the introduction of impersonal forms of communication with citizens, the centralisation of specialist units, the use of centrally-determined Key Performance Indicators and targets, or organisational scale enlargements. In some cases these measures were not only taken for instrumental reasons, but also for symbolic reasons (or what DiMaggio & Powell (1983) called cultural isomorphism): the wish to imitate the private sector or to look as a hypermodern organisation (Terpstra, 2020).

The increasing abstractness of the police can also be understood as being promoted by the growing belief in intelligence-led policing (Ratcliffe, 2016). The main assumption of this model is that police work should be based on the systematic analysis of information. In many police organisations this has resulted in the proliferation of collected data, in growing numbers of specialists for crime analysis and intelligence, and in a more risk-focused approach. On the one hand, this has contributed to loss of status and validity paid to the traditional, informal and often personal knowledge of police officers. On the other hand, the emphasis on abstract information (intelligence) and on information systems created a new organisational risk, that intelligence would become isolated from actual police work. It contributed to new forms of misunderstanding, tensions and conflicts between on the one hand operational officers and on the other hand the intelligence specialists working at special units often located far away from operational police work (Terpstra et al., 2016).

In many Western European Countries over the past two decades, there has been a debate on whether the police should concentrate on so-called 'core tasks'. In the long run, this debate has had several consequences for the police. One of these was that community policing

and policing in rural areas seem to have been redefined as old-fashioned and as less important. Often it seems that problems are only seen as important for the police if they are (re-)defined as criminal law issues. What happened in August 2015 with the nurse in the city Waalwijk can be seen as a sinister illustration of the dramatic effects that this can have. The emphasis on 'core tasks' has also contributed to the gradual loss of police visibility, local presence, and service to citizens.

The rise of an increasingly abstract character of police organisations can also be seen as the unintended outcome of a process of hyper-rationalisation, or what Ritzer (1993) called McDonaldisation. This process of hyper-rationalisation is aimed at improving efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. However, in the end, this process becomes irrational in its consequences, increasing inefficiency, unpredictability, incalculability, and a loss of control. Ritzer shows how the strong emphasis on control results in the replacement of human judgment. Rules, regulations and structures become reified with less importance and room for human skills, abilities, and knowledge. The greater distance in relations, the fragmentation of organisation, of work processes, and of responsibilities, the stronger dependence on IT communication and on system information, means the rise of the abstract police can be seen as an example of rationalisation resulting in 'dehumanizing', deskilling, and 'unreasonable systems' (Ritzer, 1993: 21, 118-122).

This process of (ir)rationalisation is also related to changes in Western European societies over the past decades, such as time-space distantiation, the disembedding of social institutions, globalisation, individualisation, and as a result the increasing dependence on abstract systems (Giddens, 1990; 1991). With the abstract police, new opportunities have been created for dealing with his more complex, hyper-modern society. In certain respects, these create more control and security for the police and police officers. However, with the stronger dependence on abstract systems and the growth of the distance created for both officers and

citizens, 'there is also a serious price to pay for these advances,' as Giddens noted (1991: 88). Abstract systems depend on trust that generally 'takes the form of faceless commitments' (Giddens, 1990: 88). This implies that trust in abstract systems does not provide the traditional 'moral rewards' that were related to more 'personalised' forms of trust. As Giddens (1991: 136) notes, the increasing dependence of daily life on abstract systems is creating new risks. This may also happen to both police organisations and individual officers. One of the risks of this process of abstracting the police is that, in the long run, this will be accepted as the 'normal', maybe also inevitable, situation. If that would happen, it will result in the belief of police officers in their work as 'an abstract task, with abstract responsibilities, working for abstract communities, abstract citizens, and evaluated by means of abstract performance targets and procedures' (Terpstra, Fyfe & Salet, 2019: 354). This may have disastrous consequences for any of the work of police forces that have accepted the principles of community policing with its strong emphasis on proximity, visibility, community involvement, citizen participation and tailor-made problem-solving approaches (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997; Skogan, 2006; Terpstra, 2010), the opposite of abstractness.

Concluding remarks: some additional notes

Since we published our original paper on the abstract police (Terpstra, Fyfe & Salet, 2019), some new questions were raised about this concept, including a desire for clarification of certain elements of our analysis.

In our paper of 2019, our explicit aim was to deal only with abstract *police*, not with abstract *policing*. Although a police organisation can be increasingly abstract, its policing can still be very concrete. One might expect that higher levels of abstractness of police organisations might go hand in hand with certain abstract styles of policing at a distance, such as big data or intelligence-led policing. On the other hand, however, in certain historical and

political contexts, increasing abstractness of the police might open the door for (re-)militarisation in policing (Harcourt, 2018). At this moment, we are not able to answer the question whether and how increasing abstractness of the police organisation will also change the style of policing. However, we expect that it will have some consequences. For now, this is a matter for more empirical research.

Some critics have rightly noted that increasing levels of abstractness can be found not only in the contemporary police, but also in other organisations. Some suggested the term abstract society, a term that we do not want to use here because in 1970 it was already introduced by Zijderveld, in a somewhat different meaning. But the conclusion seems to be right: processes of globalisation, the disembedding of social institutions, individualisation and the digitalisation of social life (see for instance Turkle, 2015) all seem to contribute to more abstract forms of society. This raises a lot of fundamental and urgent new questions, but we would like to deal with that somewhere else.

At the pre-conference of the ESC Working Group on Policing in Ghent in September 2019, some commentators wondered if our analysis of the increasingly abstract police was not a sign of a very naïve conservatism. "*Welcome to the 21st century*", as one of these critics said during the heat of the debate about our presentation, suggesting that we were not only naïve, but also anti-digital technology, full of nostalgia for a *Gemeinschaft* that has passed away long ago. Of course, the digitalisation of social life is an undeniable social fact. Digitalisation has created so many economic and social benefits that it is almost impossible to have an overview of them. The issue here is however, that the increasingly abstract police organisation does have serious negative side-effects, for the police, for individual officers, for communities, external partners and citizens. There is no reason to believe that these side-effects are unalterable or given as iron facts. The problem is that our belief in 'systems' has made us forget the importance of the presence and approachability of humans, of human skills and

capabilities, and also the importance of values connected to the presence of fellow man and of human care, not only in policing.

Is this naivety? Is this nostalgia? We do not believe so. It is comparable to what Turkle (2015) showed in her book about the negative side-effects of the digitalisation for everyday life in highly diverging everyday social contexts. The fascination of many people for digital devices, their digital addiction, has made us forget the importance and value of social conversation. She argues that there should be more room for conversation. In a comparable way, in the abstract police the balance between abstractness and the room for the 'human factor' should be restored. One of the main reasons is that abstract systems produce amoral trust, that especially in the case of the police, will probably not stand hard times. Similarly, Cottam (2018) argues that given the growing complexity of social life in the 21st century, there is a pressing need for the police to be more 'socially rooted'. She argues that the police should focus on helping facilitate stronger collaborative relationships within communities that will then foster the capabilities of neighbourhoods and individuals to flourish. Unfortunately, current trends are taking the police in the opposite direction, less socially rooted and more orientated towards abstract systems.

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