Local Sensemaking of Policy Paradoxes – Implementing Local Crime Prevention in Sweden

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Abstract

This paper analyses the policy implementation of local crime prevention and community safety programmes in Sweden. It focuses on the clash between the transnational idea-complex and the national context, i.e. the unavoidable policy paradoxes of a transnational idea diffusion, and how they are made sense of when handled at local level. In particular, it emphasizes how actors in socioeconomically different local contexts within the same urban area have partly different reasons and motives for implementation. By using a sensemaking approach, this article contributes to the understanding of how convergence at national level is followed by divergence at local level.

Keywords: Policy ideas . Convergence . Sensemaking . Crime prevention . Local government

Introduction

During the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the spread of ideas and the translation of transnational policy ideas into national and local contexts (e.g. Berman 2001; Blyth 2003; Brunsson 1989; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Pollitt 2001a, b). The hypothesis that policy is converging has been raised and debated (Brunsson 1989; Pollitt 2001a, b). As a part of globalization, transnational idea-complexes can be identified within different policy fields. The liberal and neoliberal ideology that is a driving force of globalization (Farazmand 1999) is also often representing the core values of these widely spread policies. Some of the most researched idea-complexes are New Public Management (NPM) (Goldfinch and Wallis 2010; Lane 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000) and sustainable development (Dryzek 2005; Hajer 1995; Hysing 2010; Olsson 2009). These are ideas that have been widespread at the discursive and decisional level, but have often been translated differently or been more or less influential at practice level (Olsson 2009; Pollitt 2001a, b), as supported by studies showing the importance of local context in relation to reform mechanisms (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

This article concerns another such idea-complex, namely, local crime prevention and community safety. Studies have found an extensive discursive convergence, i.e. of crime prevention policy ideas, rhetoric, norms and concepts, as well as decisional convergence (e.g. national programmes and local councils)(Crawford 2009a). As in other policy fields, a higher degree of divergence appears when implementation at local level is studied (Crawford 2009b; Jones and Newburn 2002; Muncie 2005, 2010). Researchers have argued the need for a better understanding of why and how this gap between the different levels occurs. Hence, there is a demand for a more nuanced theoretical understanding of the process leading to divergence or convergence (Fergusson 2007) and, in particular, a merging of structural and agency-led explanations (Jones and Newburn 2002).

During the implementation process, the values, solutions and social problems connected to the transnational policy idea are confronted by the actual social problems of the local context as well as the persons and organizations of the micro world (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996:7), their policy legacy and social understanding. Consequently, clashes of different kinds may occur, giving rise to policy incongruence or inconsistencies (Fergusson 2007: 182). This paper highlights those clashes and the incongruence that follows, which trigger a sensemaking process for local actors. Although performed by agents, the sensemaking process is shaped by local and historical contexts. In other words, the local context (its social problems, dominant discourses and institutional setting) mediates the adaptation of the transnational idea-complex through the sensemaking process of the local actors. This process is of particular interest concerning idea-complexes such as community safety and local crime prevention, which are directed at the local (community) level, where the influence of the national level can only be understood in relation to the local policy implementation.

The present analysis follows the transnational idea-complex as it descends through national level down to local level with an emphasis on the inconsistencies that appear and how they are made sense of. By focusing on how issues of safety and public fear of crime are understood and dealt with in the transnational idea-complex, in national policy and in various local contexts, the article addresses three questions: What policy incongruence appears? How is it made sense of in different local contexts? Is there convergence or divergence at local (practice) level?

Urban areas are often divided into segregated areas characterized by their socioeconomic strength and social problems, so it is relevant to account for different local contexts within an urban area. This study builds on empirical findings from one city, comprising documents and interviews with the eight key actors of four municipalities. It is thus limited in empirical scope. However, the aim of the study is not to draw general conclusions, but to identify a process often neglected in other works.

The paper comprises five main sections. The first introduces the theoretical framework and argues for the usefulness of adding a sensemaking approach to convergence theory in order to better understand the process of convergence/divergence. The second presents the transnational idea-complex and explores the clashes between the transnational idea-complex and the Swedish national context, arguing that they trigger a sensemaking process at local level. In the third section, the research design is described, followed by the case study of four Swedish municipalities in the Stockholm area and their implementation and sensemaking of local crime prevention policies in relation to their specific social problems. A comparative analysis presents the micro conclusions from the empirical cases and is followed by the concluding section.

Theoretical framework

In order to make sense of what happens to the idea-complex of community safety when it moves through the Swedish national context and down into different local contexts, convergence as a theoretical framework is used. In order not only to understand what has happened but also how it happened, this theoretical framework will be complemented with Weick's notion of sensemaking, which is primarily a process theory (Weick et al. 2005). In this section, therefore, the theoretical framework is introduced and the potential of combining convergence theory and sensemaking is discussed.

The concept of convergence has been widely discussed in relation to the spread of NPM. Questions have been raised and answers given concerning the reasons or motives of convergence or isomorphism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) as well as the degree of convergence in contrast to local diversity. In order to account for the extent of convergence, Pollitt addresses four different stages or levels of convergence (cf. Bennett 1991; Brunsson 1989). The first stage is discursive convergence, which is mainly confined to the world of talk and creating a policy discourse; conferences may be held and reports written, but few real actions or decisions are taken. The next stage is decisional convergence, which entails similar external labels or titles of reforms or

instruments, but the substantial content of these may differ considerably. In this study these two stages refer to the enactment and adaptation of the transnational idea-complex of community safety to the national policy level.¹ Third, there is practice convergence where actual practices or actions become similar. This level is the main focus of investigation here, where we are not mainly interested in a “yes or no” answer to practice convergence, but in the sensemaking process of the local actors. The process leading to practice convergence or divergence is investigated by paying attention to how the local actors connect the transnational idea-complex, the national context and their local contexts, and make sense of contradictions among them. Pollitt’s purest form of convergence is results convergence: when reform is put into action, which results in a convergence of outcome.

An important theoretical assumption in this approach, developed by Powell and DiMaggio (1991) and Brunsson (1989), is that agents matter. The perspective and purposes of the agent can have a significant role. The agents can act on different incentives, expressing the right attitude, doing the right thing to gain legitimacy, using the right buzzwords or addressing current social problems. Even though efficiency may be the motive, it is seen as socially constructed, given the understanding and ideas of the agent (Pollitt 2001a: 945). Constructivists argue that functional motives, such as efficiency and good environmental fit, are not necessarily the main drivers for implementation, even though they may be the rhetorical explanation of the agents (March and Olsen 1989; Røvik 2000). Other likely incentives are logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1989), legitimacy and fashion (Premfors 1998). Thus, talk, decision and action may have a looseness of fit which is particularly likely for political organisations that have to handle unsolvable problems with a high degree of complexity (Brunsson 1989; Pollitt 2001a, b).

Approaching community safety programmes means that nationally formulated aims and strategies have to be interpreted by local actors and translated to concrete local situations (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Social problems are discursively constructed and policies implicitly support, construct or reconstruct the current understanding of what constitutes a social problem (Bacchi 1999; Fischer 2003). As will be shown in this paper, a characteristic of crime prevention programmes and community safety is that they are nourished from and support more or less contested problem formulations: Is society becoming more dangerous? Are people feeling more insecure? And if so, why is this? Noteworthy also is that the policy programme is more or less the same, whereas the local context and its social problems differ. As the idea-complex meets the national institutional settings, paradoxes arise which in turn initiate a sensemaking process (Weber and Glynn 2006: 1648). By using a sensemaking perspective, the process leading to local convergence or divergence becomes visible and better understood (cf. Lipsky 1980, his analysis of the dilemmas of streetlevel bureaucrats).

Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking should be understood literally. The sensemaking process is grounded in identity in the sense that it is self-referential and that individuals construct their own

identity as well as the identity of organisations in relation to each other. It is a social process formed by interaction, reaction and action as opposed to introspection. This process is retrospective in nature since we always make sense of what happens in relation to our experiences. By making sense of situations and acting accordingly, we constantly form the environment. Hence, it is an ongoing process. Like the constant flow of life, sensemaking never starts and never stops. However, it intensifies in cases of ambiguity and uncertainty. By extracting cues (aspects or points of reference) and using frames and discourses to make sense of them, a storyline appears in which causalities are the building bricks (cf. Boyce 1996). This process not only tells us which aspects are important but also excludes other aspects or explanations. The context (i.e. local environment, policy legacy, dominant discourses and institutional settings including macro structures) is important for the sensemaking in two ways: by affecting what is extracted as cues and by affecting how those cues are interpreted (Weick 1995: 51).

Hence, sense is made through the creation of a storyline, which fits the local context, incorporates past experience and shapes the identity. Weick puts it this way:

If accuracy is nice but not necessary in sensemaking, then what is necessary? The answer is something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story. (Weick 1995: 60–61)

Stories often overstate the strength of causalities and thereby “they simulate the effect of tight coupling in a complex world” (Weick 1995:130). Even though the referent events are not as tightly coupled, the story connects them and tells us what is plausible if a crisis were to happen and the conditions were to change (ibid). Sensemaking and institutional theory feed into each other. The institutional context affects sensemaking by providing cues and social feedback, acting as a trigger by creating puzzles through institutional contradictions and by the neo-institutional notion of institutions cognitive constraints on the actors (Weber and Glynn 2006). Sensemaking, on the other hand, is the feedstock for institutionalization (Weick 1995:35), and an action formation process and hence a source of institutional change and variation (Weber and Glynn 2006:1642).

The transnational idea-complex and its clashes with the Swedish national context

The ideational shift of crime prevention reflects a transnational idea-complex. Its changeable nature makes it difficult to pin down, but its basics can be summarized in five points (see e.g. Crawford 2009a; Garland 2001; Gilling 2001; Young 1999):

- Public concern about increased crime and fear of crime.² “Community safety is a response not only to crime, but to the insecurity that surrounds crime, indexical not to the risk of crime but to the social and cultural changes that define advanced liberalism” (Gilling 2001:383).
- Concern about the weakening and fragmenting of traditional bounds of social control as well as interpersonal trust, following the individualization and urbanization of society.
- Emphasis on individual rights at the expense of general public interest, as well as the return of the victim, in which the injured individual is put in centre and the offender is not seen as a victim of his/her personal history and social circumstances.
- Concern about the limited capacity of formal criminal justice institutions to reduce crime and come to terms with rising crime levels and a detachment from the social welfare response to offending; i.e. social prevention and the rehabilitative ideal.
- Mobilization of the civil society and an aim to create preventive partnerships between public and private actors to develop prevention strategies and community policing, emphasizing local solutions to local problems.

The transnational idea-complex is representing specific social problems that need to be addressed (cf. Bacchi 1999). The problem description is what holds the policy together and makes it logical or even indispensable. By using different frames, the extracted social aspects form a storyline. The storyline of the global idea-complex implies causalities: crime rates are rising and social control and traditional bonds are weakening. As a consequence, people are feeling more unsafe. On the bases of this stated development, formal institutions and welfarist rationales are being questioned (Hughes 2002:2–3). Hence, the role of the state should be to stimulate public–private partnership and to initiate a mobilization of the civil society.

This idea-complex derives its heritage from the United States and the UK, but has been implemented not only in the majority of Western countries but also in some developing countries (Gilling 2001), hence in countries with a wide range of policy legacies. Some commentators see this trend as part of a broader neoliberal wave that has swept over the Western world (Crawford 2009b; Gilling 2001; Hughes 2002), implying the decentralization of responsibility from the state to the individual and an emphasis on individual rather than structural explanations of crime. There has been a wide range of studies on local crime prevention conducted with a critical perspective. The main criticism of this trend is that it favours socioeconomically strong groups and addresses their particular concerns and demands for safety, while the needs of more marginalised groups are overshadowed. Therefore, it is argued, it may conduce an exclusive society where certain groups are categorized as problematic, resulting in otherfication, discrimination, and social disintegration (Young 1999; Gilling 2001). The often segregated nature of urban areas is not being considered in the policies (Lidskog 2006).

The term “prevention” has also been questioned as such. In the Swedish example, the idea of an extensive welfare state, with universal and generous benefits and equalizing ideals, is to some extent an idea of social prevention. A move from these ideals towards community safety and crime prevention is then a move from early prevention towards a more reactive prevention (Sahlin 2000). In that sense, to talk about a preventive turn is somewhat misleading. This leads us to the first incongruence appearing when the global idea-complex meets the national level: the contradiction between the legacy of this policy and the Swedish policy legacy. Most research is from Anglo-Saxon countries with a more neoliberal and market-oriented system, as well as means-tested welfare provision, whereas social democratic welfare state regimes’ universalistic systems (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999) have a different policy legacy, which is not as aligned with the neoliberal aspects of local crime prevention. Even though convergence appears in social policy in Europe, studies show that it is of limited magnitude (Starke et al. 2008) and need not change the traditional distinction between the regimes of social protection (see e.g. Bouget 2003).

Notwithstanding this incongruence, Sweden has been affected by broader trends in preventive crime control strategies (Lidskog and Persson 2012). The last three decades have seen substantial changes in governmental policy (Lidskog 2006; Sahlin 2000). Since the mid 1990s, there has been growing political and public debate on crime and public fear. The current national crime prevention programme – Our Collective Responsibility, adopted by the Swedish government in 1996 – emphasizes preventive partnership, civil society, and local-level community policing. It aims to address not only crime and its prevention, but also public fear and feelings of safety. Nearly all Swedish municipalities have now implemented a local crime prevention council.

The second inconsistency that appears when the idea-complex penetrates the national level is that its problem definition is not in accord with the situation in Sweden. At the national discursive level, mainly formulated in the governments crime prevention programme (1996), the problem definition is in line with the transnational idea-complex, i.e. that crime and public fear are increasing in Sweden. However, this problem definition is weakly supported by national statistics, which indicate a radical rise in crime, by approximately 500 per cent, between 1945 and 1990, but only a rather modest increase since then, from 1.22 million offences reported to police in 1990 to 1.37 million in 2010 (BRÅ 2012). In addition, the annual survey on public safety indicates that Swedes feel very safe relative to their international peers and that today 86 per cent of Swedish citizens feel safe when out late in the evening and at night, and the trend is positive (BRÅ 2011).³ Thus, in Sweden, crime and public fear are not increasing, and social capital is high, including trust in formal institutions (Rothstein and Stolle 2003).

Lastly, since this is a social policy that is designed to operate at local level, with its emphasis on community and local solutions to local problems, it is of greatest importance to recognize local differences and their impact on crime prevention and community safety ideas and policies. There

is an inbuilt contradiction here, a transnational idea-complex, implying specific social problems but at the same time emphasizing local solutions to local problems.

To sum up, three inconsistencies or contradictions have been identified, that arise as the policy as adopted in Sweden; the incongruence between the neoliberal policy heritage and the social democratic heritage of Sweden; the causalities of the global storyline not being supported by national statistics; and the incongruence between the social problems of the transnational storyline and the particularity of the local context. These inconsistencies cause contradictions and ambiguities that trigger the sensemaking process (Weber and Glynn 2006; Weick 1995). A process also challenged by the difficulty in bridging the technical and knowledge-based rationalities of crime control on the one hand and expressive, emotionally driven and morally toned parts on the other hand. The research has often focused on the former (Garland 1999), while the people implementing the policy need to put these two together.

Research design

In order to capture the translation of policy to different contexts and how they are made sense of in terms of problem definition, four municipalities in the Stockholm area were studied, following a most different systems design (Anckar 2008). Two of the selected municipalities are characterized by high socioeconomic status and low crime rates, whereas the other two are characterized by the opposite pattern. From these characteristics follow different related local problems. This selection was made on the assumption that the local context affects the sensemaking of policy inconsistencies. A most different systems design at local level would show this and hence give the opportunity to nuance the critique directed towards crime prevention policies, based on analysis of the discursive and decisional levels.

The empirical material, gathered in autumn 2009, comprises eight in-depth interviews with the key actors in each municipality (the local civil servants and the council's leading political representatives in each municipality⁴), supplemented by documentation of municipal crime prevention programmes as well as meeting protocols from local crime prevention councils (2007–2010 when available). The empirical material also comprises documentation of the national crime prevention programme, including closely related material.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the local work and organization and how it related to other organisations as well as societal developments, including the aims, goals, challenges and limitations of their work. The interviews with civil servants were generally more extensive than those with local politicians. Although local crime prevention councils are chaired by political representatives, civil servants play a key role in these municipalities, considering themselves as having great influence over the direction of their work. Whereas the political representatives must govern various activities and can allocate only limited time to crime prevention tasks, the civil servants work full-time for the local councils. They are central to

networking activities, have contacts with the national crime prevention council, attend seminars, and exchange knowledge with other local councils. The civil servants thus play the key role in terms of the ideational shaping of local policy implementation. There are exceptions to this, as found in one of the four studied municipalities, where the political representative allocated considerable time to the work of the local crime prevention council. The politicians have a central role in terms of having decided to have a local council and set the framework for it. They have also had an important influence in hiring the civil servants and thereby choosing their profile.

In the next section of this paper, the municipalities' different storylines are presented, followed by a comparative analysis.

The local level – the four municipalities

Despite their different contexts, all municipalities have the same main policy instruments: neighbourhood watch, safety inventories (although in different contexts) and attempts to engage people to participate in night walks.⁵ However, municipalities each have different reasons and motives for forming a council and using policy instruments. When making sense of their work, they extract different cues and give meaning to them through partly different frames, which affects the way they are implemented.

Danderyd

Danderyd is the socioeconomically strongest municipality and has one of the lowest crime rates of the Stockholm region. The local crime prevention council of Danderyd is the newest of the four and was established in 2007, although the municipality already had a neighbourhood watch network, managed by the local police. Since its foundation, the council has arranged safety inventories and administered an online questionnaire with the aim of obtaining opinions from members of the public on what safety means to them and what they feel needs to be done. According to presentations at council meetings, people feel safe in Danderyd. On the council's website, the chair of the council argues that "it is true that Danderyd is a safe municipality to live in, but even 'the secure' could still be improved" (Danderyd Local Crime Prevention Council 2010a). First on the council's list of tasks is to find out what the problems are, followed by proposing remedies, stimulating public and public-private cooperation as well as civil society engagements, follow-ups, communication and dialogue (Danderyd Local Crime Prevention Council 2010b). Hence, the policy has been adopted without a locally defined problem to address, but on behalf of the transnational and national storyline.

The main instrument that Danderyd works with is an IT-solution called SafeSite. SafeSite allows anyone connected to the programme to send and receive messages of anything suspicious taking place in the municipality. The local council educates civil servants, store owners and their personnel as well as the general public in this technical system. They are engaged in convincing as many as possible to connect to SafeSite. Especially attractive as potential members are those

who spend a lot of time in the public space, such as dog owners or senior citizens. In the words of the civil servant, they “teach people to think safety”. However, the information material for SafeSite does arguably encourage suspiciousness:

Suspicious people? Someone doing graffiti? Ongoing crime? SafeSite is immediate and continuously updated information about suspicious incidents that might be taking place close to you. Does this sound interesting? Then SafeSite is something for you! SafeSite is a Web-based safety solution based on the classic motto “one for all, all for one”. (Danderyd Municipality, Danderyd Local Crime Prevention Council, and Adilimo AB 2010)

The respondents in our study see the council as a complement and a partner to other local actors, especially the police, but also the school, the neighborhood watch networks, the planning department and so forth. Another actor that they regularly work with is the local mall, where they give lessons in SafeSite and other safety routines. The problems that they see in their municipality are burglary and personal theft, especially directed towards young people. The local council counteracts this by supporting the police and neighborhood watch as well as providing SafeSite and information about risks. The remedies have a protective approach focusing on the individual residents of the municipality and preventing situations that render crime possible. Offenders are not considered to be a part of the local community.

SafeSite encourages people to be suspicious and fearful, which is counterproductive to the aim of generating feelings of safety. When respondents consider why people feel unsafe, they talk about an unjustified unsafety, fed by internationalization and the unpredictability that follows. It is not a question of local problems needing to be addressed. The civil servant refers to one of the national neoliberal debaters, stating that nowadays we have time to feel unsafe and that it is human nature to feel unsafe somewhere and to be cautious. She also mentions media organisations as crucial actors when it comes to generating feelings of unsafety, by exposing crime and other bad news.

Hence there is a disconnect between the problem of unjustified feelings of unsafety and the remedy, which encourages people to be suspicious and stay alert. The application of the policy in Danderyd (in particular the use of SafeSite) supports the criticism directed towards community safety policies: that they cause “otherfication” and consider the feelings of safety for the strong middle-class while disregarding the weaker groups in society (Gilling 2001; Young 1999).

Lidingö

Lidingö has the lowest crime rates in the Stockholm area. Respondents explain this by the fact that the municipality is situated on an island and has an economically relatively strong populace. The local council works mostly on youth issues and cooperates with other official services including the police. Other enacted policies include graffiti removal, adapting the outdoor environment to prevent crime and a one-to-one marking strategy by the police directed at drug

addicts, burglars and careless moped drivers. They are mainly occupied with situational prevention. In the words of one respondent:

The council works with the visible problems, which means you typically follow the view of the police, like police report statistics. For example, we have some problems with graffiti, which for a lot of people, a lot of graffiti creates a feeling of insecurity. So we've worked a lot with the outdoor environment. Creating a feeling of safety by having a graffiti policy and by trying to cut back shrubbery and improve the street lighting. (Interview 3)

The actual problems addressed include drinking habits among youths and other problematic behaviour, such as shoplifting, threats and fights in school. The role of the council is to be a platform for cooperation among local authorities.

Local crime prevention in Lidingö has decreased in the sense that a few years ago the municipality had neighbourhood councils that dealt with issues concerning smaller local areas. This organization was found to be too expensive and was therefore discontinued. Another example is that social services earlier worked with night walks with a preventive purpose. However, they changed to a promotive strategy: their aim is now to strengthen the young, and so the social services seek to avoid a role that includes punitive or surveillance aspects. Consequently, there are no longer any social workers doing fieldwork or participating in night walks. The council tries to engage parents to be the carrying force for this, but with poor results (according to the respondents).

Both respondents agree that Lidingö does not have any “real problems” and refer to the municipality as a sheltered workshop. The problems addressed (mainly concerning the situation for the youth, burglary and theft) are made out as something they do for lack of “real problems” to address. The social problem expressed is that “people feel more unsafe in a much safer society”. The civil servant goes further and reflects that a crime prevention approach and addressing unsafety substantiates the claim that society is in need of this, i.e. is getting more dangerous. In that sense, trying to solve the problem feeds the problem – that people are feeling unsafe.

The media has a great interest in this, which means there's more pressure on us to do the right thing, or to do something. Because of this, sadly, I don't think this paradox gets so much consideration. Instead the argumentation goes like... 'yes, but it's better to do something for the safety here', 'yes, but it's not really necessary', '...but then we have done something and shown people that we take them seriously', '...but we would just confirm that they feel unsafe instead of going out and saying that we don't need to be afraid'. But who says that today? ... If the municipality would say that, then it might backfire. You wouldn't be able to stand up against the media storm. I believe that there is a fear when the media are involved, which means that they [feel a need to react, and thereby]

support this feeling of unsafety, which is sort of cowardly, really. (Interview 3)

Hence, as an explanation for why these social policies are still being implemented, there is a question of legitimacy. Even though this paradox is very present in the thoughts of the leading civil servant, it is not a position shared by everyone in the municipality. The respondents give voice to an ongoing argumentation whether situational prevention (such as surveillance cameras) is necessary.

Another given explanation of why the expressed problem (i.e. that people feel more unsafe even in a safer society) occurs is the changeable nature of contemporary society:

The society we are part of is going through changes when it comes to both the composition of the population, and also how society is organized and what professions we have, and other structures are changing. So, on a higher level that's probably it: that we're a changing society and that that makes a lot of people feel kind of unsafe and scared about not knowing what's to come. I think there's an explanation there. (Interview 4)

The emphasis is put on different aspects or developments often connected to the risk society and the individualised society (Bauman 2001; Beck 1992), as a macro frame for explaining the assumed demand and need of safety from the citizens. This argumentation supports the understanding of the problem as emotional rather than a problem of actual security.

To conclude, in the socioeconomically strong municipalities, respondents argue that people feel less safe in a safer world, that the demand for control is increasing and there is a drive to eliminate all risk. According to the respondents, this fear is fed by the media as well as political action aiming for legitimacy rather than being concerned with actual social problems. Public fear is a concern. However, taking the local situation into account, the implementation is symbolic: local social problems are understood as marginal in a comparative perspective and are not considered the reason for implementing and using these instruments, which is done for reasons of legitimacy.

Haninge

Haninge is one of the municipalities with a weak socioeconomic standard that struggles with one of Stockholm's highest crime levels. Haninge has had a local crime prevention council since the end of the 1990s. The municipality is segregated, with parts of it inhabited by a strong middle class and containing various forms of owned housing, while the other part comprises public housing and rental apartments. This divide is a central feature in this case.

Haninge has many activities connected to the local crime prevention council, partly because the politician and chair of the council allocates significant time to this particular assignment. The neighbourhood watch is very active in the owner-housing areas. As in the other municipalities,

Haninge does safety inventories, has a public–private agreement on graffiti removal and an organization conducting night walks and social fieldwork (Lugna gatan). A local crime victim centre (brottsoffercentrum) has recently opened with support from the local council, which also has an annual award for local crime defenders, as well as an annual information day called Safe Haninge Day (Tryggahaningedagen). However, despite all these activities, when respondents are asked what work they do, they put much of the emphasis on communication and information aspects:

[T]oday you get daily reports about all the negative things that happen, both nationally and internationally, but also on the local level. You get it through the media...What happens for a lot of people is that you build up a sort of mythical picture depending on what you read and what you hear about... it's not about quietening things down, it's that there's no balance in those news stories. And that means that every week there's new news to strengthen that myth: that we live in an unsafe environment...I think that's a challenge for the municipalities, to turn that mythical picture around...That's the challenge, to find the model to reach out to the public and make them feel that it's not so bad after all. The other things are more cosmetic really, like how we deal with street lighting or make plans to cut back vegetation... (Interview 5)

The key issue (or extracted cue) is the public's feeling of unsafety caused by onesided coverage in the media. The remedy is action not for its own sake, but for the purpose of acting as the good force in society, which, according to the respondent, "raises trust and creates a notion that you're a part of some sort of safe society" (Interview 5).

However, respondents express awareness that the social problems causing unease in society are more common in the rental apartment areas, and that the people living there experience the greatest risk, although they conclude that these policy instruments do not work in such areas. There is a will and an ambition to reach the people living in the rental apartment areas, where the information assumed to be needed is about risks with alcohol and youth being out at night, as well as the costs of graffiti removal and the related need to look after young people. The local problems are explained by a lack of parental engagement with the youth as well as a language barrier, which renders it more difficult to reach these areas with information and the policy instruments at hand.

The increasing feelings of unsafety (fed by the media) are associated with the richer parts of the municipality, whereas the increasing crime and disorder, as well as decreased social control are associated with the poorer parts of the municipality. At the same time, the remedies are mainly applied in the richer parts, since that is where they are considered to fit, resulting in the loose coupling between problem description and policy instruments, seen in the socioeconomically strong municipalities.

Botkyrka

Botkyrka is the municipality with the most problematic situation relating to the socioeconomic context and crime. Botkyrka has segregated areas with different socioeconomic standards, though it is dominated by apartment areas with a high number of rentals. Social segregation, unemployment and criminal networks are social problems that the municipality faces, and has over time created institutional settings to deal with. This contextual background shapes the understanding of the problem and the local sensemaking of the crime prevention work.

The local council was established in 1999 and has one civil servant, a safety coordinator, with a long career within the social services and thereby a strong and established position in the municipality as well as an established personal network. The safety coordinator works in a team with a security coordinator and reports to a security manager. His task is to coordinate the relevant work in the municipality and to act as an educator and consultant within the organization of the municipality as well as in relation to local authorities. The council has had a change in approach from prevention to promotion. The basics of the promotive approach are to identify positive aspects of an area or neighborhood in order to strengthen those aspects rather than identifying problems. That “perceived safety” is one of the performance measures of the municipality also indicates that the work of the crime prevention council is well grounded in the municipality.

The civil servant in Botkyrka coordinates a more extensive cooperative network than in the other municipalities. The local crime prevention council operates a number of local crime prevention networks that are considered to be the base of the local safety work. The local organization contributes to anchor the work in the local community and to engage local police, administrators, fieldworkers and the general public. The policy instruments do not differ much from those implemented in the other municipalities: neighborhood watch, safety inventories, night walks and local policing, but is to a large extent performed by the municipality⁷ and dominated by a social welfare approach. The resources for local crime prevention work have been used for coordination and strengthening of the local social work with an additional articulated goal of safety. One example is to coordinate and create activities for the youth and to facilitate local networks with local young people, civil servants and local police:

[D]uring the autumn break such as we have right now, [it is important] that there are a lot of activities going on... things to do and people know what's happening and there's good information all round. So when something serious happens, we have a good network to work in. The other thing is that we have a strategy not to go around with the sirens on ...we try to work with a soft approach and not commit the mistake of going around with the sirens on, and offending the young people in all kinds of ways. (Interview 7)

Since the population in Botkyrka is heterogenic, programmes such as neighborhood watch and youth activities generate opportunities for meetings and bridging between the different groups or

individuals in the society. A main challenge is considered to be “that subcultures want to build up their own structure” (Interview 7). This challenge obstructs the integration of the work in different parts of the municipality and is considered crucial to overcome. Another difference from the other municipalities is that the people committing crimes are seen as internal to the community, and that questions of rehabilitation, alternatives to prison and respectful treatment of problematic youths are thereby considered as crucial policies.

The formulation of the problem in Botkyrka is more diverse and complex, containing several societal dimensions. At a more general level, problems connected to unemployment, segregation and health are mentioned as key issues to solve in order to address the feelings of unsafety. Social disorder and crime are seen as symptoms of societal distress caused by segregation and unemployment:

We have a lot of distress to deal with, but we are pretty good at dealing with it, so our concern is more with the slower processes: how to eliminate segregation, how to get young adults to get a job, and those kinds of things...If themumand dad are unemployed and the next generation are unemployed and the next, that is the society that we are about to get. Those are the threatening scenarios that work against us. And thenwe have the criminality that is growing all the time, which is a great concern we have to work against in different ways. (Interview 7)

Social exclusion and a lack of human capital are seen as causing general feelings of unsafety that can create a downward spiral and lead to criminal behaviour. Hence, there is a resemblance to the global problem definition. However, a rising crime level is a consequence and not the initiator of the storyline.

Whereas the policy instruments may help inclusion within the municipality, the structural problems of segregation and social exclusion remains untouched. The policy instruments are given a social preventive approach in order to address the structural social problems identified (or at least the symptoms of them). However, the root of the problem is at national or international level and can consequently not be changed by actions at local level alone: segregation cannot be combated within a segregated area.

This is something to which the respondents return. They seek to lift the question to the national level and argue the need for a crime prevention organization at the regional level in order to get an overall perspective of the Stockholm area. In contrast to the socioeconomically strong municipalities, where the pressure towards convergence is considered to come from citizens and the media, the convergence here is an effect of national politics. It is a way for the municipality to obtain the resources needed in order to deal with social problems.

Comparative analysis

When translated to the local level, the problem definition of the transnational idea-complex is detached. The storyline, connecting and giving sense to the different aspects of the problem formulation, is dissolved. Since crime rates are not rising (which is the trigger in the storyline of the transnational idea-complex), the feelings of unsafety and the work of the councils has to be given a new sense. A concrete example is that both Botkyrka and Lidingö are dissatisfied with having the concept “local crime prevention” in the name of the council. While in favour of terms such as “preventive council” and “safety coordinator”, they seek to detach themselves from the association of crime. If considering the phenomena present in the transnational storyline, rising crime rate is the easiest to contradict in relation to the specific area. When the trigger is questioned, the other ties of the story are weakened, the tight coupling of causalities that the story simulates dissolves, and new frames enter the sensemaking process.

Depending on the local context, the municipalities struggle with different paradoxes during their sensemaking or rewriting of the story. In Danderyd it is recognized that the municipality has few social problems connected to crime and unsafety. Still, the storyline of the idea-complex is accepted and the policy is adapted. That the municipality has a stable right-wing rule is a facilitating factor for the adaptation and implementation of a neoliberal policy. The situational approach is most elaborated in this municipality. The local concern with those excluded or under suspicion are to hold them at distance and, being alert, they are not thought of as being a part of the municipality.

In Lidingö there is an explicit sensemaking process in which the central aspect of the problem formulation is the feeling of unsafety (and not crime). They argue that they do not have any “real problems” in their municipality. The causal tie emphasized is that a risk-and-safety discourse in the media, and in politics and policy itself triggers and supports feelings of unsafety. Thus the local council is recognized as being a trigger of the problem, by substantiating the felt unsafety and the need to react. They find themselves torn between their own storyline and that of the risk-and-safety discourse and the transnational idea-complex, where the municipality is the legitimate agent to react towards rising crime and unsafety. Consequently they have implemented the policy for reasons of public legitimacy. The local actors find themselves torn between legitimacy and efficacy or righteousness, therefore the civil servant strives to eliminate the perceived need for a local council.

The central paradox in Haninge municipality comes from the segregated social context. The argumentation in Haninge has a similar causal logic as in Lidingö, i.e. that the uniform media picture nourishes and supports feelings of unsafety, so the council tries to balance this information flow. In that way the local council tries to influence the sensemaking of others, i.e. sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991), which is seen as the most crucial achievement. Respondents do not, however, connect the feelings of unsafety to the implemented policies or local council as in Lidingö. The implemented crime preventive policies are associated with the

socioeconomically stronger parts of the municipality where they are found to fit. At the same time, the social problems of concern here originate from the weaker parts. These two contexts are not parts of the same storyline, but are separate storylines with different frames and cues, according to which the richer parts suffer from unfounded feelings of unsafety. The apartment areas are seen as socially problematic and in need of risk information and parental engagement. Notably, when approaching the social problems of the apartment areas, the perspective of community safety and local crime prevention is dominant and the welfarist policy legacy is not present, even though the crime preventive policy is not considered to fit.

Botkyrka differs the most by extracting different cues and frames than the other municipalities. The minority perspectives, as included in Botkyrka, need to tie together more cues, and tend to lead to a wider and more divergent framework (Weick 1995:141). This explains why the policy has been more extensively translated in Botkyrka and has been included (even organizationally) in the municipality. Even though crime and feelings of unsafety are concerns, they are framed differently from in the transnational idea-complex and included in a welfarist rationale. As we have seen, the reasons or motives for this convergence differ: in the socio-economically stronger contexts, legitimacy is a strong driver of convergence, while in Botkyrka, the policy and its instruments are translated into means for handling the consequences of more structural problems, such as unemployment and segregation.

Concluding discussion

As a consequence of globalization, policy ideas spread around the globe and to some extent we have witnessed a convergence of economic as well as social policy. Studies of major policy fields have found an adaptation/convergence to transnational idea-complexes such as NPM, sustainable development and community safety in a range of nations. However, when studying the local level and the implementation of these policies, divergence appears. When the global ideas meet the local context they need to be made sense of in relation to that particular context. This paper has emphasized the need to study the sensemaking process in order to better understand the interaction between global ideas and local context.

As the transnational idea-complex of community safety is adopted at the Swedish national policy level, three inconsistencies become visible: the community safety policy is neoliberal (Crawford 2009b; Hughes 2002) while the Swedish policy legacy is social democratic; the problem description of the transnational idea-complex is not in accordance with the statistical findings of the situation in Sweden; and the policy emphasises local solutions to local problems, although similar policy instruments are implemented in different local contexts. These inconsistencies are present in the discursive and decisional stage (national policy formation), but it is at the practice

stage (local level) that the implementation is made, and local actors have to fit the policy to the local context. At this stage, the contradictions and ambiguities become real and trigger a sensemaking process.

The sensemaking process differs across the municipalities, depending on the local context and the nature of sensemaking. Hence, from convergence at discursive and decisional level, a divergence process is found at the local, practice level. Similar policy instruments are implemented, but for different reasons and to address partly different social problems. Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction and is retrospective in nature, so the experiences of the actors involved is what forms the sensemaking, as does the previous and existing local institutions and their culture. However, it is also social in nature and the actions and statements made by the actors are formed by the existence of a receiver. As we have seen, the local actors do more or less directly engage in sensegiving, an activity that becomes central to the local councils since the feelings of unsafety are considered to be unfounded and not in relation to the actual levels of crime. The detachment of the causality (of the transnational idea-complex) that rising crime levels cause rising levels of fear of crime and feelings of unsafety, liberates the cue that people are feeling more unsafe. New frames are therefore used to make sense of the unsafety and what the main concern for the councils is.

One repeated storyline in the socioeconomically strong municipalities is that people are feeling more unsafe in a progressively safer society. The major driver in their storyline is the sensationalised media, lacking nuance and giving a one-sided image of the society. Having a crime preventive council supports this image of an unsafe society, which leaves the councils in a paradoxical situation between legitimacy and efficacy. Solving social problems and counteracting crime is not the major reason for local crime preventive work, and the policies are even seen to fit best in the socioeconomically strong areas with low crime. In the socioeconomically weakest municipality, the social context is more complex. Consequently, the sensemaking process has a wider range of frames and cues. Structural explanations of crime and social exclusion, together with the individualization of society are frames giving meaning to the unsafety that people feel. The policy is translated to fit the welfare institutions and the social democratic policy legacy. This is in line with studies that have shown that community safety workers have regarded the policy as a means for resuscitating more social democratic politics of control (Edward and Hughes 2009; Hughes and Gilling 2004).

Results convergence has not been a part of this research project. However, by studying sensemaking, one finds indications. People act, make sense of things and thereby form the material that become the constraints and opportunities they face. Hence, these processes of sensemaking will naturally affect the results. One could reasonably argue that Danderyd runs the risk of feeding suspiciousness and fear of “the other”, while the adaptation of the policy made in

Botkyrka is more likely to facilitate dialogue as well as possibilities for meeting “the other”, considering the heterogeneity of the municipality. Hence, there is reason to nuance the critique directed towards community safety and crime prevention policies, i.e. that it causes social exclusion and meets the demand for safety from the strong middle class with a disregard for more marginalized groups. The different ways of making sense of the policy may in the end lead to results divergence.

The critique seems to be more accurate in strong socioeconomic and homogenous contexts, where the policies are also found to fit best without translation. However, the example of Botkyrka shows that the idea-complex can be adapted to fit a more exposed and socially complex environment (cf. Gilling 1997 according to Alister 2009:105) with a social democratic institutional setting, and the critique does not seem to be as relevant here. The local nature of crime prevention policy may facilitate the adaptation of the policy to particular contexts and social problems. However, as this case shows, it may also delimit the opportunity to address structural issues (due to the segregated nature of local contexts), which need to be dealt with at regional or national level.

There are tensions and contradictions between policy at discursive, decisional and practice level due to different actors and conditions at the different stages (cf. Fergusson 2007; Muncie 2010). Although this study is limited in its empirical scoop and the results should be viewed as preliminary, it contributes to the study of global policy spread and convergence by studying the sensemaking process of the local actors and the interplay between structure and agency. It thereby makes sense of the convergence and divergence appearing at local level. It shows the importance of studying the process leading to convergence or divergence, often not considered in the literature on policy spread and convergence. However, future studies are needed to learn more about how local actors receive and make sense of policy and how this process interacts with local context to form different policy outputs.

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