



The changing arguments for assigning non-organised volunteers as assistant supervisors in the Swedish prison and probation service

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Abstract

This study explores the ideas behind and development of assigning non-organised volunteers as assistant supervisors within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. The Swedish way of collaborating with volunteers in supervision of offenders is unique in an international perspective. This article includes an international literature review for this area that seldom is studied. With the help of Charles Tilly's (1998) concepts of script and improvisation, this study shows how the Prison and Probation Service adds a strong script of cognitive behavioural theories and methods to their work, which have impact on their fulfilment of the legislators' expectations of including volunteers in their practice. Further, this study shows how the volunteers' role and position has evolved from being partners with a mainly supportive role to being subordinate collaborators executing an intervention. It is argued that the idea of having volunteers connected to the practice hypothetically enables flexibility, whereby work with clients can be individually designed and facilitate the balance between support and control. In practice, however, this is not the case. Instead, the local improvisations seem to strive to avoid volunteers rather than develop the potentials in this construction.

Keywords

civil society, penal policy, probation, supervision, volunteers

Volunteers have been an essential part of the probation and parole system in Sweden since its inception. The history of probation and parole in Sweden dates back to 1906, when these community measures were first stated in law. In 1918, the law was amended so that the courts could order supervision as part of probation and parole, and volunteers organised through philanthropic associations were assigned as supervisors. The investigation that served as preparatory work for this legislation mentioned the possibility of employing probation officers but claimed that such officials could be regarded as too controlling, which could harm the rehabilitative ambitions (Sakkunniga 1917:27). In 1942, a professional state-run probation service was established for controlling and supporting the work of supervising offenders in the community. Nevertheless, for a long time, the supervisors continued to be volunteers, where each volunteer had an assignment for a specific person, one to one (Svensson, 2001). A new penal code was subsequently implemented in 1965,

with community sanctions and measures in focus. It was followed by a reform in 1973–74 whereby the probation service went through a transformation. During the three following years, three hundred new probation officers were employed (prop.1976/77:88). Soon these professionals took over the role as supervisors, and the number of engaged volunteers decreased. From 1970 to 1990, the share of clients with a volunteer as supervisor decreased from 90% to 45% (Svensson, 2001, p. 110).

In the early 1990s, the probation service underwent another reform. At the time, international discussions were being pursued about an ongoing punitive turn, also within probation service development (see, for example, Garland, 2001). However, the concurrent development in Sweden at this stage was arguably more of a managerial turn (Svensson, 2015). More structured measures were introduced, such as community service in 1990 and electronic monitoring in 1994. These measures were regulated in separate laws, one for community service (Lag (1989:928) om samhällstjänst) and one for electronic monitoring (Lag (1994:451) om intensivövervakning med elektronisk kontroll). A transition can at this time be seen from the more flexible interpersonal exchange in one-to-one supervision towards structured interventions. Under the concept of ‘What Works’, standardised programmes spread over the world with an ambition to make probation practice evidence based, while critics emphasised “the beliefs that only programmes matter and there is a technical fix for everything” (Raynor, 2003). As in many other countries, programmes based on cognitive behavioural theories came to dominate the practice in Sweden.

In Sweden, in 1995, a total of 283 treatment programs were recorded. In 1997, Sweden initiated a close collaboration with James Bonta from Canada to align these programmes with the What Works criteria. In 1999, a national group was established to promote a unified approach, and in 2002, an accreditation panel was formed to provide scientific support. This progression later encompassed structured methods for evaluating the staff engaged in the programs, as well as for the organisation and management of treatment within the Prison and Probation Services (Krantz, 2014). Despite these changes, the presence of volunteers persisted, albeit with little acknowledgment.

The probation service exists in most western countries and manages community sanctions and measures. The service has its roots in voluntary and philanthropic associations from the 19th century. Today, the practice of community sanctions and measures has in general been taken over by paid professionals, most often with training in social work or law (van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008). Nevertheless, the UN (1990) has declared minimum rules for non-custodial measures, where the following precept is stated:

Public participation should be encouraged as it is a major resource and one of the most important factors in improving ties between offenders undergoing non-custodial measures and the family and community. It should complement the efforts of the criminal justice administration. (UN, 1990, VII, 17.1)

The UN also underlines the need for carefully screening and recruiting volunteers, as well as supporting them in their endeavours. The Council of Europe Probation Rules state that ‘[p]robation shall remain the responsibility of the public authorities, even in the case when services are delivered by other agencies or volunteers’ (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 9). However, the Council of Europe also states that ‘[v]olunteers may be involved in certain aspects of probation work. They shall be adequately selected, supported and resourced’ (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 34). Despite the international recommendations, the Confederation of European Probation (CEP) has shown that volunteers are engaged

in only a few European countries (CEP, 2023). In some countries, specifically in Eastern Europe, volunteers are not even allowed in probation practice. In other countries, for example, Denmark and Finland, the law allows participation by volunteers, but it seldom occurs. More often, volunteers are assigned to a limited number of specific and concrete tasks – such as within the implementation of community sentences or in mediation. When the probation services do assign volunteers, this is most often done through voluntary organisations. Experiences from such arrangements can be found, for example, in England and Wales, where voluntary organisations can be commissioned after an open procurement exercise for specific services (CEP, 2023).

Two countries stand out in a European overview of volunteers in probation services, namely Austria and Sweden. In Austria, a private non-profit organisation, NEUSTART, has a contract with the Ministry of Justice for upholding a national probation service. Both professionals and volunteers are engaged in the work involved. Volunteers do the same work as professionals, but yet with fewer cases and less complicated cases (Koss & Grafl, 2013). In Sweden, a state agency, the Prison and Probation Service, employs professionals to handle all cases, and volunteers are, in addition, assigned to specific clients on a personal basis. There are no contracts or commissions and no voluntary organisations. The reasons for this distinctive approach in Sweden remain to be explored.

While most other countries have abandoned the use of volunteers, or arranged their participation in contractual forms (CEP, 2023), the development in Sweden demonstrates another pattern. How is this motivated? Why are single, non-organised, volunteers assigned to people under probation and parole in Sweden?

Aim

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of why the Prison and Probation Service in Sweden engages private persons as assistant supervisors, thereby involving non-organised volunteers in implementing sentences. How do legislators argue for this construction? What arguments are put forward by the implementing agency, the Prison and Probation Service? Are the arguments from the two parties aligned?

The ensuing text starts with a literature review of knowledge on this form of engaging volunteers, where the uniqueness of Swedish practices is highlighted. A descriptive contextualisation of these practices is then presented before the key sections on the legislators' script, as well as the script and local knowledge of the Prison and Probation Service. The results are discussed in the last section in relation to the function of volunteers in the Swedish system. This last part of the analysis makes comparisons between the legislators' ambitions and the actual practices whereby implementation takes place, as well as how these ambitions and practices have developed over time.

Volunteers in the penal sector: Literature review

Studies of volunteers in the penal sector are scarce, while research on the voluntary penal sector is, as Quinn (2019) has noted, dominated by literature on how the neoliberal project has put volunteering at the forefront, how volunteers contribute to an extension of penal strategies, the voluntarist ethos and how it distinguishes volunteers' practices from services delivered by state agencies. Tomczak and Bennett (2020) ask for a normative evaluation of 'civilian' involvement in criminal justice, as the engagement of civil society in the implementation of sentences could be seen as a neoliberal extension of punitive institutions in society. Thus, studies of the sector should be separated from studies of the volunteers. I argue that studies of volunteers in different contexts should likewise

be separated. Tomczak and Buck (2019) distinguished three categories of volunteers in this sector: '(i) statutory volunteers, directly recruited and organised by State agencies; (ii) quasi-statutory volunteers, organised at arm's length from statutory agencies; (iii) voluntary organisations, not directly organised by the State but sometimes receiving State funding' (p. 277). The statutory volunteers act in relation to different state agencies, which include the probation services. The expectation on this group deserves a specific focus, as they are non-organised. They are single private persons with assignments.

The Nordic countries still reflect the influence of what Esping-Andersen (1990) called the social democratic welfare regimes. Thus, there is a low level of engagement of voluntary organisations for providing welfare services, as most services are provided by the state. Nevertheless, there is a tradition also of engaging non-organised volunteers for tasks in the welfare sector. In Sweden, the involvement of non-organised single volunteers performing interventions as assignments for authorities exists in different parts of the welfare services, such as in the disability services and social services, especially in child welfare. Research is, however, rare. Only one study has been conducted concerning volunteers in the disability services in Sweden. In this study, Mallander (2011) showed that the assignment was focused on friendship with little or no ambition to create any change in the client's situation, and no formal goals were set. Real friendship rarely developed, however, as the contact persons kept their client separate from their personal network. A recent literature review has shown that only 15 studies can be found on contact persons for children from the Nordic countries since 2010 (Lehto-Lundén et al., forthcoming). The few studies are all small and descriptive, hence no deeper scientific knowledge exists in the area.

The few Nordic studies on volunteers directly assigned by the prison and probation services also involve more descriptive analyses. In the broader area of volunteers in the penal sector, Olesen (2022) has followed the new strategy for the Danish Prison and Probation Service to include civil society organisations in their practice and also studied the interorganisational collaboration involved. Helminen (2019) has moreover studied Finnish voluntary organisations in the penal sector, also in international comparison, but has focused on the involved organisations' roles as service providers, and not on the individual volunteers assigned by the state.

This notwithstanding, the unique practice in Sweden is very seldom studied. Only two Swedish studies have been published in recent decades. Svensson (1994) focused on the probation officers' arguments for engaging volunteers. Kindgren (2012) evaluated the system with assigned volunteers in a report from a governmental assignment. Her study was based on rich material comprising surveys with volunteers and clients, interviews with probation officers and volunteers, as well as additional register data. The overall result consisted of findings about volunteers' characteristics, but also the conclusion that all involved parties tended to be satisfied with the practice. Nevertheless, the probation officers saw difficulties in their work with volunteers. They talked about having too little time for them, and that they lacked knowledge on how to support the volunteers. These arguments could also be related to the arguments from volunteers, that they could feel insufficient and received too little support from the probation officers. Still, the experiences of the volunteers were predominantly positive, focusing on the satisfaction involved in helping others, and on the joy of seeing the client's life changing in a positive direction. Kindgren (2012) concluded that positive interpersonal relations between the client and the volunteer could be beneficial to a prosocial development for the clients, that the probation officers' work with volunteers needed to be developed, and that further research is needed to discover more about the effects of having volunteers assigned to clients under probation.

While the Nordic, and specifically Swedish, way of assigning volunteers is unique from a European perspective, volunteers directly assigned by state agencies exist in some Asian countries. A few studies have been published on these cases – for example, in South Korea. Here, volunteers work with offenders under the guidance of probation officers (Hwan, 2012). The Korean studies have not focused as much on the volunteers as they have on the overall organisation (Hwan, 2012), the role of the family (Park, 2012), restorative justice (Lee, 2011) and probation officers' workload (Kwang & Hahm, 2019). However, one Korean study did focus on the volunteers' experiences of the process in relation to their clients and distinguished different roles and steps in the process, although the analysis was based on only 11 interviews (Shin, 2019).

The most explicit knowledge on volunteers in Asian probation comes from Japan, where volunteers also are engaged directly by the probation service. The Japanese system has relied strongly on volunteers. A reform of the legal framework in 2006 clarified the roles of the volunteers and the probation officers – concurrently, a greater number of officers were employed, and the number of cases for each officer was reduced. While the probation officer is a government official, the volunteer is a non-permanent government official and a private citizen (Watson, 2018). The volunteers and probation officers work in teams. The volunteer has two to three cases, and the probation officer can have 80–100. Since 2012, all probation officers in Japan have training in cognitive behavioural therapy, and the clients must participate in treatment programmes (Minoura, 2018). During recent decades, the number of engaged volunteers has declined in Japan (Akashi, 2018; Minoura, 2018). Surveys have examined volunteers' expressions of being psychologically burdened by their contact with clients, their difficulties in finding time for their tasks (related to work and family life), and other issues (Akashi, 2018). In 2008, Offender Rehabilitation Support Centers were established to provide a space to meet clients, but also for volunteers to meet each other (Akashi, 2018; Watson, 2018). Fewer volunteers now declare that they feel fulfilled by task-related contributions to the community or offender rehabilitation, and the volunteers are also now asking for more support and guidance (Akashi, 2018). The Japanese system has served as a model for other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (Akashi, 2018). A study from the Philippines showed that volunteers regarded their work as promoting social capital and behavioural change (Tumitit, 2020b). They were more likely to be interested in an assignment if they could feel satisfied about working with the cases they were assigned (Tumitit, 2020a). While the Asian studies, and specifically the Japanese ones, give good insight into the systems and the volunteers' perspective, nothing is found on whether the engagement of volunteers has any form of effects, or what kind of influence it has on the outcome for the clients.

Methods, material and analysis

This study is based on document analysis. It is part of a broader project, where similar constructions of assigned volunteers in the disability services and in the social services (mainly for children and youth) are also included. The broader project is designed for comparisons both within each sector and between the three sectors, in line with George and Bennett's (2005) model for case studies. For the present sub-study, only the material concerning volunteers connected to the Prison and Probation Service is used for the comparison over time and between legislators' ambitions and the policy in the probation service's practice. We follow the development since the 1980s. This period is chosen as it covers a time when both welfare policy and criminal policy changed tangibly in the years around 1990. Legislation was changed, and the involvement of volunteers started to be

discussed in Sweden under the term ‘civil society engagement’ (Linde & Scaramuzzino, 2017).

The documents have been collected through a ‘snowball-process’, starting with published governmental Inquiry Commission reports on reforms in the prison and probation system from 1980 onwards. These reports are openly available online. As a first step, an overall scanning was conducted of all commission reports within the field of criminal justice, with a focus on sanctions. Every report was searched for the Swedish words ‘*lekm**’ (English: ‘volunt*’) and ‘*övervakare*’ (‘supervisor’). It was found that, in total, only eight Inquiry Commission reports had examined volunteers. The sections where volunteers were brought up were read, and text directly connected to the theme was copied into a document that, in the end, came to be about 35 pages or 12,500 words in length. Two of the Inquiry Commission reports had treated the issue of volunteers more thoroughly, which is why the background material for these commissions’ work was studied at the National Archive in Stockholm. This material included, for example, action plans, notes from hearings with probation staff, and informational material from the Prison and Probation Service.

More recent material was then collected in a next step from the Prison and Probation Service. Some sources could be obtained from the authority’s web page, while other documents could be obtained by contacting staff at the authority’s head office. This material consisted of annual reports, regulations, plans, handbooks, educational material and other related material produced over the last ten years. In addition, oral information has been given in two separate online meetings with two members of staff at the Prison and Probation Service’s head office, both with overarching tasks in relation to volunteers in this practice.

The collected material has been analysed through qualitative content analysis (see Drisko & Maschi, 2015), where the steps taken have firstly concerned whether volunteers are mentioned, thereafter in what contexts they are mentioned, and finally how they are discussed. The analysis has been guided by questions concerning what is expected of the volunteers, and what value they are seen as adding to probation services. Thus, even if the content of the documents is in focus, the analysis has also touched upon expressed values.

The analysis is guided by Charles Tilly’s (1998) way of understanding organisational improvisation, and the discretionary flexibility in the practice. He argues for a relational model of understanding human actions within organisations, where social transactions and bonds between actors have importance for what will be said and done. He says ‘... transactions clump into social ties, social ties concatenate into networks, and existing networks constrain solutions of organisational problems and clarify the creation, maintenance, and change of categorical inequality’ (Tilly, 1998, p. 21). Tilly’s conceptualisation describes how improvisation leads to upholding a system, which helps to understand the discretionary use of policy in practice. This perspective means going beyond both structural and individual perspectives to focus on ‘the relational constraints within which all individual actions take place’ (Tilly, 1998, p. 34). The two main components in Tilly’s understanding of improvisation are local knowledge and scripts. While a given script for social relations promotes uniformity and defining its overall frame, local knowledge promotes flexibility within the frame (Tilly, 1998, p. 55). The way local knowledge and scripts are combined makes different forms of improvisations possible.

The governmental inquiry commission reports serve as some of the more thorough preparatory works for the amendment of laws, or for decisions on new laws. The task domain for a given inquiry commission is delineated and assigned by the government, which is why these reports can be regarded as giving voice to the legislator’s perspective (though not all suggestions in any given report are ultimately transformed into law). Inquiry commission

reports thus constitute examples of prevailing policy discourses in a given time period and context. As such, they are part of what Tilly (1998) would call the script for probation services. The legislators' script can be seen as being expressed in the basic assumptions underlying the preparatory works prior to legislation.

The legislators' script

In the following section, the legislators' script is highlighted through the key arguments that recur in the inquiry commission reports. Thus, this section responds to the question of how legislators argue for assigning non-organised volunteers to the work of the probation service, showing how the position of the volunteers gradually changes.

From being an actor to being a complement

The Criminal Code does not define who should perform the work with implementing sentences passed by the courts – it only uses the concept of 'supervisor' (*övervakare*), which covers both the professionals and the volunteers. Even if the law does not discriminate between these categories, the distinction has been elaborated on by inquiry commissions. Already in 1981, the idea of naming the volunteers as 'assistant supervisors' (*biträdande övervakare*) came up (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 87). The same concept returned later in relation to youth justice (Ungdomsbrottskommittén, 1993, p. 358), while the concept of 'support person' was suggested in 2005 (Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, p. 824). Despite the different suggestions, even today, the legislation does not distinguish between professionals or volunteers as actors. The Criminal Code states that 'the Prison and Probation Service appoints supervisors and may appoint one or more persons to assist in the supervision' (Criminal Code, Ch 26 §13). This way of describing the actors leaves space for variation, which will be shown later.

In 1981, an Inquiry Commission argued that 'the goal should be that a volunteer is appointed in every client case' (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 47). However, later, in the 1990s, the tone shifted. Now the volunteers were argued to be 'complements' to the professionals. A commission on responses to youth crime (Ungdomsbrottskommittén, 1993) argued that 'beside the supervisor, there could be assistant supervisors that in general should be volunteers' (p. 358). The volunteers were no longer crucial actors but could provide perspectives and carry out tasks that professionals could not always contribute.

Such an arrangement, in which both an official and a volunteer are involved in the supervision, offers great advantages. You can then organize the work in such a way that the official puts the emphasis on the control, while the volunteer can function more as a contact and support person. (SOU1993:35, p. 363)

Even so, the 1993 commission still argued that 'volunteers should always be part of the supervision work' (Ungdomsbrottskommittén, 1993, p. 563). The tasks should be shared, so that the professional had an emphasis on control and the volunteers on support. From being regarded as one of the actors, the volunteers now received a complementary role, with the primary task of being supportive towards clients.

In the first decades of the 21st century, the transformation of the volunteers' role went even further. The volunteers were still viewed as crucial actors, but with a slightly weaker position than before, which is reflected in statements such as: 'A volunteer must be appointed - - - *unless there are special reasons*' (Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, p. 829, author's italics). There was an obvious shift in the volunteers' role, as they were

now more obviously positioned below the professionals. Concepts such as ‘complement’, ‘beside’ and ‘support the professional’ were frequently used in the reports (see, for example, Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, p. 825, 828–29).

An often-mentioned need of national variation in the extent of volunteers, connected to descriptions of the practice, can be related to the geographical diversity of Sweden. One major axis of diversity concerns differences between the situations in the larger cities and sparsely populated areas. Further, diversity issues also pertained to how volunteers could reach clients with other languages.

Reasons for the appointment of a volunteer are that the convicted person has special needs that a volunteer can meet, e.g., that the convicted person does not speak Swedish or that he or she lives in a sparsely populated area with a relatively long distance to the nearest probation office. (Påföljdsutredningen, 2012, p. 378)

Even if a shift in focus seems to take place over time, from the volunteer to the professional as the key actor in probation, the shift is not explicitly argued for in any report. It is a gradual change, where the volunteers’ position changes from being one of the key actors to being complementary.

From social support to supporting control

Adding volunteers to the probation officers’ practice, instead of letting volunteers replace the professionals, opens up a broader way of working. When differentiated roles are brought up in the documents, the argument has been to separate the controlling and supporting aspects, but also to combine the actors’ presumably differing skills. Over time, we can see a shift from support to control in the volunteers’ task delineation, as well as in how the understanding of the client has changed.

In the 1980s, the volunteer was seen as important in providing ‘socially desirable contacts’, while the probation officer was expected handle the more controlling aspects (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 131). Even so, the same commission argued that the volunteer should ‘fulfil all the tasks that are connected to the supervision. Thus, any division of labour between the professional and the volunteer should not take place’ (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 131). Also in the 1980s, the volunteer was argued to have had a role in societal enlightenment. As expressed by one commission: ‘Successful work in the Prison and Probation Service must be supported by awareness among the citizens about criminality as a social and human problem’ (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 123). The 1981 commission argued from a perspective on crime as a social problem and focused on the importance of anchoring rehabilitative efforts in the community. Thus, the volunteer was a very important actor for the societal aspects of criminal justice. However, in the 1990s, the volunteer instead started to be put forward as a role model:

It has often been emphasised in discussions about young offenders that there are many among them who lack good male role models. A committed volunteer should be able to fulfil an important function here. (Ungdomsbrottskommittén, 1993, p. 363)

Here the volunteers’ role is often described in relational terms. The contact should ‘constitute more of an everyday relationship and no guidelines for where the client and the volunteer should meet can be given. The essential thing is that a good and close contact is established’ (Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, p. 846). By 2005, the controlling tasks

also came to be made more explicitly relevant for the volunteers, while the importance of anchorage in the community was only briefly mentioned, and then in addition to the control, as follows: ‘The volunteers’ opportunities to enhance the clients’ social contacts are important, as is the informal social control that contact with the clients’ environment can give’ (Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, p. 826). From the volunteers’ role of giving the clients chances to be established in a new social context, the task had changed to gaining insight into and control over clients’ existing context.

In the more recent commission reports, there are also arguments for involving volunteers in more controlling aspects of probationary work. There have been suggestions that clients should be given stricter guidelines for contacts with the supervisor, and thus that volunteers should also be subjected to stricter demands that clients be reported for misconduct – if, for example, the client does not show up for a meeting (see, for example, Påföljdsutredningen, 2012, p. 29 and Frigivningsutredningen, 2017, p. 255). The legislator’s ideas about the volunteers’ tasks in relation to support and control show a shift from a supporting relation with elements of control to a role where supportive and controlling tasks are more explicitly intertwined. Even if the volunteers are an obvious part of the script for this practice, they are described vaguely in most respects, which opens up space for a flexibility that could lead to a wide variety of exercised roles.

Ideally, in relation to the legislator’s contemporary script, flexibility should be governed by the probation officers’ professional discretion, so that every client gets a well-tailored period of supervision, fully connected to their needs and situation. However, knowledge on how to manage such processes is lacking, which is why there is an obvious risk for arbitrariness, meaning that the sentenced person may never know exactly what will happen. In the commission reports, texts about volunteers being ‘suitable’ for the task recurringly reappear, but what that means is seldom developed. Rather, the regulations within the Prison and Probation Service are referenced instead (see, for example, Kriminalvårdskommittén, 2005, pp. 826–31).

The Prison and Probation Service’s script and local knowledge

When the legislator’s script relies on data from the implementing body, it stands clear that this level also has scripts that should be considered. Thus, this section aims to show the arguments for the non-organised volunteers put forward by the Prison and Probation Service. The implementing body has the role of transferring the script and the policy given by the legislator and forming it into relevant practices in line with local knowledge. Before going into the key questions here, the parallel changes in the probation service’s practice must also be highlighted, since they are part of forming the script.

The Probation Service’s script

The Prison and Probation Service is an independent governmental authority under the Department of Justice. Its central mission is to implement prison and probation sentences and instructions for community service, as well as to supervise conditionally released persons and deliver pre-sentence reports to courts. Moreover, it is responsible for remand prisons and a transport service (Prison and Probation Service, 2022). It is annually allocated a budget and specific tasks in so-called ‘letters of regulation’ from the government. In these documents, specific tasks can be assigned to an authority regarding issues that have received governmental attention. The authority shall then demonstrate how these commissioned tasks have been executed and developed in their annual report of the authority’s activities. In 2020, this was the case for the issue of volunteers in probation.

Over recent decades, the probation service has changed towards more structured work and more in-house education of staff. Probation officers in general have an academic degree in social, behavioural, or legal sciences. Their work is in practice governed by cognitive behavioural theories and the principles of Risk-Need-Responsivity – in line with Canadian models, based on the works of Andrews, Bonta and others (see, for example, Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2007, 2017). From these principles, a model with structured conversations based on a standardised risk assessment, originally named STICS (*Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision*), was implemented under the Swedish name *Krimstics* in 2017. The model was tested in a pilot, whereafter staff were trained in its use all over the country, even though the model was not evaluated until 2019. The evaluation of the pilot did not show any significant results at the client level, but proved that the probation officers' working mode had changed and that they generally followed the provided model (Starfelt Sutton et al., 2019). As of 2019, all probation officers are expected to work in line with *Krimstics*. In this model, the probation officer has a more structured contact with clients, and it is stipulated that the volunteers cannot replace the professionals in maintaining continuous contact. The volunteer becomes explicitly an extra resource, an additional contact.

While the probation service has focused on implementing *Krimstics* since 2014, the volunteers have received less attention. During the years 2008–2011, 49–54% of the clients had a volunteer appointed. By 2016, this level had decreased to 26%. That year, a total of 4,400 persons had assignments as volunteers (Prison and Probation Service, 2016). Since 2016, the volunteers have not been included in the public annual statistics, but some numbers are shown in the annual reports. In 2018, the number of assigned volunteers was below 2,000 (Prison and Probation Service, 2019a). This pertains to the whole country, and it is evident that there is huge local variation in the probationary use of volunteers. In 2019, the variation was between having volunteers assigned to 1% of the cases in the district with the least coverage to 43% in the district with the most coverage (Prison and Probation Service, 2020).

Based on this development, reformative work started in 2018–19. The concept of 'assistant supervisors', replacing the former 'laymen supervisors', was introduced as part of a new way of thinking about volunteers' roles. The Prison and Probation Service renamed the volunteers on their own initiative, but without referring to the fact that they borrowed a concept that had been discussed in Inquiry Commission reports in both 1981 and 1993 (Frivårdskommittén, 1981; Ungdomsbrottskommittén, 1993). The new concept instead took its point of departure in the Criminal Code: 'The Prison and Probation Service appoints supervisors and may appoint *one or more people to assist in the supervision*' (Criminal Code, Ch 26 §13, author's italics). The authority had thus found a way to distinguish between the two categories and could now name the professionals and the volunteers differently.

The focus on cognitive behavioural programmes, the Risk-Need-Responsivity model and lately *Krimstics*, has developed into a very strong script within the Prison and Probation Service, a script that now permeates all guidelines. The legislators have not given any guidelines for this way of working, but they have shown an interest in volunteers. In the Letter of Regulation for 2020, the government demanded that the Prison and Probation Service report 'in which way the authority plans to use assistant supervisors within the context of the changed working methods' (Prison and Probation Service, 2021). There are no explicit arguments for why this demand was included in the Letter of Regulation, but the Prison and Probation Service had already been discussing the question, and there were preparations for enhanced guidelines. So, when the task was given, the Prison and Probation

Service developed an action plan. The aim was formulated as having volunteers assigned to all clients that had been assessed as 'low risk' by the end of 2021, while half of those with a higher 'risk' should have volunteers assigned before the end of 2023. In total, the intention was to have a volunteer assigned to 25% of the clients by the end of 2021 – a goal that was not reached. The proportion of clients with an assigned volunteer was at that time 17%, with a variation between districts ranging from 3% to 50% (Prison and Probation Service, 2022). Even though the earlier goal was not reached, the Prison and Probation Service argued that there had been a change, in that the number of volunteers was by 2021 no longer decreasing, with more volunteers now assigned than in the year before. This development was said to be the result of a cultural change, with the assignment of volunteers now described as an intervention rather than the engagement of another actor:

Enacting a culture shift means increasing knowledge and understanding of the intervention as an important part of the relapse prevention model and thus as a complement to other interventions in the client's enforcement planning (Prison and Probation Service, 2022, p. 32)

Based on the new way of working, with the structured models of *Krimstics*, the heightened attention paid to volunteers also meant that the Prison and Probation Service strived towards writing a new script for the practice of assigning them. This script is now manifested in handbooks, guidelines, educational material and other documents, material that here informs the section that follows by pointing out how the work should be done.

A supportive intervention on the side

Since 2019, already before the Letter of Regulation for 2020, a *Handbook for Supervision* assembles the guidelines for the practice. It emphasises that assigning volunteers should be beneficial for the client, but also for society (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b). The handbook is continuously updated but dated to 2019. The version used here was updated in April 2022. In the handbook, the Prison and Probation Service argues that the volunteers have an important democratic role in the transparency of the service's activity towards the citizenry. Volunteers can provide knowledge on how sentences are implemented, but also on the situations and hardships that the clients experience. The volunteers are said to have a role as 'ambassadors for a humanistic criminal justice system and voice for persons who otherwise would have difficulties making themselves heard' (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 67). This role relates in a sense to the one mentioned in the preparatory works for legislation that have been assembled since the 1980s. However, in this original legislative work, the volunteers' role was referred to as fostering 'awareness among the citizens about criminality as a social and human problem' (Frivårdskommittén, 1981, p. 123). There is a subtle but important distinction between this original formulation and the new one about how the volunteers are now supposed to be ambassadors for the criminal justice system. As seen in the legislator's script, the shifting perspectives are seldom argued for, but it is gradually changing.

The gradually changing role is also visible in how the volunteers' tasks are articulated in the handbook. Here, as in many earlier texts, the volunteer is said to be acting as a link to society in order to support the clients' trust in authorities and society – in parallel, it is articulated that volunteers can strengthen clients' networks and their 'sense of participation' in society (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 68). Hence, the volunteers should provide a humanistic content that 'enhances other interventions in the client's implementation plan'. Still, the role of the assistant supervisor is obviously subordinated to that of the probation officer, who has a central role in the design of the supervision.

It is the probation officer who ensures that the contact obligation is followed, which is why he should also be appointed as a supervisor. For various reasons, there may be reasons to also have an assistant supervisor. An assistant supervisor is usually a representative from civil society but can also be a probation officer. (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 53)

Now, it is made clear that assigning a volunteer to the client is optional – as stated in the quote above, since there now ‘may be reasons’ for the assignment of an assistant supervision comprising either an individual from civil society or a probation officer. The value of the volunteers is not explicit. Even though this could be seen as providing an opening for professional discretion and flexibility, the script is strict and provided in detail in the handbook. An example could be taken from the description of how the frequency of contacts should be decided:

The most frequent contact frequency that can be selected ... is once per week and the least frequent is once every two months. A contact frequency of once every two months should only be chosen for low-risk clients who are also in contact with an assistant supervisor. (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 54)

Within the strict script, assigning a volunteer as an assistant supervisor promotes flexibility when it concerns ‘low-risk clients’. The lowest contact frequency concerns low-risk clients, and it is also for these clients that volunteers should ideally be assigned. There are also basic controlling conditions for volunteers to follow, such as regularly reporting to their probation officers and specifically, without delay, informing them if the client in any way deviates from the plans (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 70). The probation officer is the main actor, and it is stated that the volunteer can also be invited to meetings between the probation officer and the client, ‘to gain insight in the work the probation officer is doing’ (Prison and Probation Service, 2019b, p. 62). Moreover, it is made explicit that if the volunteer deviates from the plans, or is later shown to be unsuitable for the task, the assignment can be cancelled.

Still, the handbook is not fully consistent; there are cases where it is envisioned that the volunteer can replace some of the employed probation officer’s contacts with the client. Such cases concern, for example, the last phase of a long period of supervision. Here we also find the often-mentioned geographical conditions, since replacement can be relevant when there are long distances between the client’s home and the Probation Service’s office, or when the client is in a treatment facility.

In the supplementary material, called *Intervention: Assistant supervisor*, examples are given for how the probation officer can recruit, assign and collaborate with the volunteer (Prison and Probation Service, no date). This material emphasises that the volunteer is a representative of civil society, not an actor within the probation service, and a partner with whom to collaborate in the same sense as with other societal actors and actors within the Prison and Probation Service. The volunteer’s assignment is described as a ‘supporting assignment with controlling elements’ (Prison and Probation Service, no date, p. 4). Further, it is stated that the volunteer should have clearly designated tasks, and that professionals should make sure that the volunteer has understood his/her tasks. Tasks for the volunteer could be to act as a prosocial model, enhance prosocial behaviour, facilitate integration, enhance the probation service’s interventions, or report relapses in the misuse of alcohol or drugs or participation in crime, in addition to providing support to relapsed clients.

Discussion

This study has elucidated policies from legislators as well as the implementing body regarding non-organised volunteers in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, and it is time to discuss whether the arguments from the two parties are aligned. The results of this study concern two dimensions. The first dimension deals with the discrepancy in how the legislator and the Prison and Probation Service form their scripts for volunteers in probation. The second dimension relates to the variation over time in arguments for assigning volunteers to the supervision of clients, the relevance of local knowledge in the different probation services' practices, and how local knowledge promotes variation. The question of *why* volunteers are engaged in probation is not easy to answer – this depends on whose perspective we take and which time we focus on. There are too many perspectives to consider – the interaction between what Tilly (1998) calls scripts and improvisation colours both policy and practice.

A tension between the scripts in policy and practice

Since the Swedish Prison and Probation Service is an autonomous authority, it has the right to decide how its goals should be reached. Thus, the authority creates its own script. The script is based on the tasks assigned by the legislators and the government, but the way the work should be performed is decided within the organisation. The Prison and Probation Service leans heavily on ideas based on cognitive behavioural theories, a perspective shared with many other countries (CEP, 2023; van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008; Minoura, 2018). The *Krimstics* model governs the work, which is why the model is the key component in the organisation's script. For these reasons, the scripts from the legislator and the implementing body are at variance with one another.

Taking one step further, we can discern that local knowledge plays a dominant role in local performance. This explains the variation in assigning volunteers, which can vary significantly between local service districts. In any given year, the percentage of clients with assigned volunteers can be as low as 1% in some districts and as high as 43% in others. Tilly (1998) argues that scripts include established routines as well as formal rules and regulations, while local knowledge is built on tacit understandings developed in the local context. That could mean that if the working group in one local probation service develops a specific way of relating to the hardships and difficulties in working with volunteers, they will also act to establish this understanding in local practices. Local knowledge upholds flexibility, and improvisations are necessary in discretionary practice. Scripts and local knowledge interact, in the sense that while scripts aim to establish uniformity, local knowledge aims to establish flexibility.

While the legislators take the volunteers for granted and always include them, even if they seldom go into any detail about them, the Prison and Probation Service has not always done so, at least not in practice. When the probation service had implemented *Krimstics*, and thus changed the script for their way of working, the local improvisations led to a radical drop in the share of clients who were assigned volunteers. When we consider flexibility built on local knowledge, we can understand the highly varying extent of this trend in the different local probationary service districts. However, when the local variation co-varies across the country, and a national decrease is shown, it influences the government's reaction. The government can therefore demand a response concerning how the Prison and Probation Service would work to increase the number of volunteers. Hence, the Prison and Probation Service's script once again includes the volunteers, becoming part of the extensive work to include their role in precepts within handbooks, educational material etc.

In Tilly's (1998) terms of scripts and improvisation, scripts were made more conjoint again, and were strengthened to limit the scope for improvisations.

A changing role for volunteers

The arguments for volunteers as supervisors have varied over time. Their role has always been argued to be supportive, strengthening clients' links to normal life in society. The volunteers' role has also always included some aspects of control. Yet, over time, there has been a slight dislocation of the volunteers' roles and tasks. From a focus on the importance of citizen transparency and people in society having knowledge of the hardships faced by people who commit crimes and experience sentencing, the focus has shifted towards being a societal ambassador for the criminal justice system. Further, the position of the volunteer in the system has also shown a slight slide, from being one of the actors, working together with professionals in most cases, to being an external collaborator that might or might not be used. As the professionals' positions are strengthened, in the sense that they decide about the assignment of a volunteer, the volunteer's position is weakened. Tilly (1998) argues that categorical pairs, such as that of professional and volunteer, are built on relational bonds. When one of the parties in the pair (here: the professional) has another strong relation (here: the probation service and its script), the dominance within the pair shifts. Local knowledge and flexibilities are influenced by the strengthened script, which means that volunteers increasingly end up in a subordinated position.

Conclusion

In sum, this study has shown that the use of non-organised volunteers in probation services offers flexibility when they are assigned individual tasks, so as to support individual clients under supervision. However, this volunteer assignment is used within a script that has become more and more strict. Volunteers have roles in giving clients a better anchoring in society, and they can increasingly perform both supportive and controlling tasks. Hence, volunteers can be used as flexible mediators between policy and practice, as well as between the supportive and controlling functions in probation and parole. The volunteers promote discretionary flexibility and enhance variation, but in a time when the script is increasingly strict, this flexibility is challenging. For now, the Prison and Probation Service struggles to keep both their own and the legislator's script, so that the use of volunteers and cognitive behavioural models can be united.

In an ideal setting, this flexibility would promote better outcomes for both the client and society. However, no studies have been conducted on the effects of having volunteers assigned, either in Sweden or anywhere else. In fact, knowledge is lacking about both the content of volunteers' work and the outcomes of their involvement. As Tomczak and Bennett (2020) and others argue, volunteers may be part of a neoliberal expansion of punitive practices, including in Sweden. Regardless, we should strive for an increased understanding of what is actually going on in the probation services. The Swedish way of assigning volunteers to the probation practice could be a remainder from earlier days that does not work with contemporary practices, but it could also be a valuable way to integrate a humanistic interpersonal support into a punitive practice.

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