



Notions of power in the plural policing of nightlife

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Abstract

This article explores policing organisations' notions of power and their perceived ability to ensure public order in nightlife environments, drawing on fieldwork with patrolling police units, private security guards and the voluntary organisation 'the Night Ravens' in Oslo, Norway. Although the formal right to use power through force and coercion towards citizens rests with the public police, previous research has demonstrated that uniformed personnel in general could represent or symbolise authority relative to the public. I question how notions of power underpin order maintenance activities conducted by policing agencies whose work is covered by different legal frameworks. The findings show that power in order maintenance work is seen as a relative phenomenon, primarily comprehended as a legal feature that rests with the public police. However, participants in private and voluntary organisations also describe opportunities to enforce order in the nightlife setting. The article discusses the similarities and differences between the three agencies and provides insight into the nexus of power and order in public, private and voluntary policing.

Keywords

power, authority, plural policing, order maintenance, nightlife

Introduction

The nexus of power and order maintenance has become particularly complex in the aftermath of the pluralisation of policing. 'Plural policing,' as a concept, has brought attention to the many agencies outside of the public police organisation that contribute to the promotion of safety, security and order in public, semi-public, and private spaces (Crawford, 2008; Jones & Newburn, 2006; Larsson & Gundhus, 2007). Considering this recognition, new premises for and practices of power have been revealed: while it has been noted that the police formally retain coercive and regulatory powers, developments of distinct relational, social and symbolic power emerge in new settings (see Dupont, 2006; Mopasa & Stenning, 2001; Myhrer, 2011). In line with this, it has been argued that uniformed personnel outside of the police organisation also possess power or authority relative to the populations they engage with – despite the lack of legal access to use power in public spaces (see Innes, 2005; Kammersgaard, 2021; Mopasa & Stenning, 2001; Stenning, 2000). As such, this article focuses on the context of nightlife environments, and draws attention to public, private and voluntary agencies' notions of power in their order maintenance activities.

Considering the differences in the legal frameworks that form the basis for these organisations' work, this article asks: What notions of power underlie plural policing agencies' practices of order maintenance in nightlife environments? Delving into policing personnel's comprehensions of power relating to their work generates valuable insight into the relationship between legal frameworks and practices, and further contributes to advancing our knowledge of how power is translated into policing activities. The findings in the article are based on interviews and observation data collected from three key actors engaged in nighttime policing in Oslo, Norway. Representatives from public police patrolling units, private security guards (PSGs) working as bouncers or conducting mobile patrol rounds, and the voluntary organisation the Night Ravens (NRs), who conduct patrols by car, bicycle, and on foot, are the subjects of the study. The focus on three distinct policing actors offers a unique comparative insight into the nexus of power and order maintenance. Exploring the plural policing of nightlife reveals how power in order maintenance work is comprehended as a relative phenomenon: while primarily viewed as a legal feature that rests with the public police, the participants of private and voluntary organisations still partly experience opportunities to enforce order in the nightlife setting.

The article will first address contextual aspects of plural policing in Norwegian nightlife environments and provide detail on the legal framework that regulates the organisations' activities. Following this, a conceptualisation of power in plural policing is presented. After describing the methodological approach, I analyse how notions of power unfold in the organisations' policing at nighttime. The analysis illustrates that the agencies draw on both legal frameworks and their perceived ability to ensure order to make sense of their powers, and further how strategies of order maintenance can be regarded as an implicit exercise of power. Finally, the article's discussion section compares the three organisations, and highlights how implicit and explicit positions of power are essential in understanding plural policing actors' involvement with order maintenance at nighttime.

Legal frameworks and the plural policing of Norwegian nightlife environments

Aiming to mitigate crime, disorder and harm caused by alcohol consumption and intoxication, public, private and voluntary agencies all take part in the policing of nightlife in the Norwegian context (Foshaugen, 2022). The nightlife setting is typically associated with bar areas where a concentration of violence and disorder occurs, and as such, various bodies of policing personnel undertake the role of ensuring order in these spaces (Wadds, 2020). The nightlife does, as such, denote a peculiar context for policing. Moreover, the Oslo nightlife setting is interesting as an example of a local jurisdiction where multiple agencies are involved in tasks of order maintenance, while legal frameworks that regulate the work of these bodies differ.

In terms of power, the public police is the one institution that has a legally established right to exercise force against citizens through physical intervention and coercion (Finstad, 2018). It has previously been noted that this right is one of the unique and core features of the police (Bittner, 1970). Although provided with the legal option to use means of power, the legitimate use of them is conditional: their interventions must be both 'proportionate and necessary', and not be used unless these requirements are met (Hine et al., 2018; Lie, 2010). In the Norwegian context, the public police's means of power are ranked according to their potential for physical harm, presented as a pyramid that begins with presence and moves upwards to more physical or violent techniques (Lohne Lie & Lagestad, 2011; NOU, 2017:9). In this sense, the public police hold power in terms of having the possibility to

use coercive means, as well as in terms of their symbolic power (Loader, 1997; Martin & Bradford, 2021). Nevertheless, it has previously been reported that the Norwegian police rarely use physical power in their everyday work (Lagestad, 2015). How this unfolds in the nightlife context poses a pending empirical question.

Despite the fact that the police have been given the role of society's power apparatus, not recognising that organisations outside of the police potentially hold alternative varieties of power could be misleading (Stenning, 2000). Private security operates on another legal basis – often seen in relation to the space within which they conduct their services (Myhrer, 2011; Søgaaard et al., 2016). In terms of nightlife policing, they do for instance hold the legal authority to deny people access to or remove people from privately owned property (Button, 2007), which can be considered “just as effective and far more frequently used than detention and prosecution” (Lomell, 2014, p. 265, my translation). However, this task must be carried out without the use of physical force (Myhrer, 2011). In Norwegian legislation, there are no distinct provisions granting security guards authority to use force against individuals (Larsson & Gundhus, 2007; Myhrer, 2011; Wegner, 2009, p. 85). The Act regulating the provision of security guards' services explicitly states that any individual that carries out guard duties “does not have the right to use physical force beyond what is permissible for any individual” (Vaktvirksomhetsloven, 2001 § 12, my translation). In emergency situations of necessity or self-defence, however, a security guard may use available means to protect themselves (Wegner, 2009). Following this, scholars have taken an interest in the powers that security officers use, as well as how they adhere to law and legislation (Button, 2007; Hansen Løfstrand, 2024). In that regard, reference has been made to private security guards' use of symbolic (Mopasa & Stenning, 2001), soft (Kammersgaard, 2021) and social power (Button, 2007; Myhrer, 2011). Through these studies, it has been noted that strategies of negotiation and communication are utilised in order to elicit compliance from the public (*ibid.*).

While the powers of public and private security have gained scholarly attention, there are few studies pertaining to the potentials for power by volunteer organisations that take part in policing. Some scholars have underlined that the power volunteer actors possess is the same as that of “an ordinary citizen” (Uhnøo & Hansen Løfstrand, 2018; van Steden, 2018). Nevertheless, a few studies have demonstrated how police volunteers experience confusion regarding the scope of their responsibility and the specific tasks falling under their purview (Hansen Løfstrand & Uhnøo, 2019), and the degree to which they can or are obliged to intervene in citizen encounters (Foshaugen, 2024). Examining the practices of the Night Ravens (NRs) provides an empirical setting to explore how power functions as a feature of voluntary policing. The NRs are a voluntary organisation that patrols cities and municipalities in Norway as well as other Scandinavian countries (Larsen et al., 2015), ‘hiking’ through areas in their local community in the evening and at nighttime (Foshaugen, 2024). According to the bylaws of the NRs, their main activities consist of being “visible and accessible, based on the idea that it helps assuage violence and vandalism” (Natteravnene, n.d.). While their power is regulated on the legal premises as of any ordinary citizen, they are considered contributors to order maintenance through their “observing” and “helping” function in the nightlife context (Foshaugen, 2024).

Whereas the police's legal provision to exercise power is justified for the purpose of ensuring public order (see Hine et al., 2018; Martin & Bradford, 2021), the forms of power accessible to private and voluntary contributions to order maintenance require empirical attention. Whilst various agencies, with different legal and normative frameworks (Larsson & Gundhus, 2007), aim at providing safety, security and order in the same context,

questions emerge regarding how these organisations comprehend their power and their ability to ensure public order. How do power and order reflect the agencies' notions of their nightlife policing? Exploring this, the article further conceptualises power in plural policing to shed light on the nexus of power and order maintenance.

Conceptualising power in plural policing

As provisions of safety, security and order in public and private spaces are being provided by agencies across the public, private and volunteer sector, the need to distinguish 'police' and 'policing' has become necessary (Jones & Newburn, 2006). Decoupled from the public police organisation, 'plural policing' denotes the large spectrum of formalised social controllers that work to maintaining order, while 'policing' pertains to activities aimed at enforcing norms and order (Jones & Newburn, 2006; Larsson & Gundhus, 2007; Rogers, 2017). To shed light on the nexus of power and order maintenance in plural policing then, this article draws on Crawford (2008) formulation of four key aspects of policing:

first, it entails intentional action or purposeful condition; secondly, it involves the conscious exercise of power or authority by an individual or organisation; thirdly, it is directed towards rule or norm enforcement, the promotion of order or assurances of safety; and fourthly, it seeks to govern in the present and/or the future. (Crawford, 2008)

As such, power in policing can be understood as the practices that are performed with a desired aim to either ensure safety, promote order, or enforce rules or norms from a position of awareness of authority. The ability to consciously promote 'power' through efforts that seeks to ensure 'order', highlights how order maintenance must be seen in conjunction with its effects and intentions, as well as its potential outcomes (Button, 2007; Dowding, 1996; Engelstad, 2005). "Outcome power" has as such been utilised to describe "the ability [...] to bring about or help to bring about outcomes" (Dowding, 1996, p. 5). Scenarios where order is the sought outcome of the policing actors' work hold the potential to reveal both direct and indirect acts of power. Seen as a feature of policing then, power can be explored through the actors' strategies to make the public adhere to prevailing norms and rules, and empirically investigated through policing agencies' notions of 'intentional' or 'purposeful' actions (Crawford, 2008).

Moreover, strategies of power and order have the potential to unfold in complex ways through policing agencies' activities. In relation to Crawford (2008) definitions of policing then, this article pertains to the agencies' awareness of their potential powers when striving to ensure order in the nightlife setting. Considering that order maintenance holds potential for revealing acts of power despite distinct legal premises across different agencies, exploring the notions underpinning these practices is essential to further understand the provision of plural policing. It has previously been noted that various policing agencies make assessments differently and draw on distinct interpretive frameworks (Søgaard & Houborg, 2018, p. 199). In line with this, scholars have emphasised that such notions do not solely emerge from legislation and training, and further demonstrated that "negotiations" of legal frameworks can be constructed through practices on the ground (Hansen Löffstrand, 2024). To grasp how power and order are comprehended in the plural policing of nightlife, empirical insight is needed as legal frameworks differ across agencies that work intentionally and collectively to ensure norms and order. The next section accounts for the methodological approach conducted to obtain empirical insights into how these

phenomena unfold when multiple policing agencies work alongside each other in the nightlife setting.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to explore notions of power in public, private and voluntary policing bodies' order maintenance at nighttime. The research draws on empirical material conducted at nighttime with public, private and voluntary policing bodies in Oslo, Norway. The data consists of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and participatory observations. Data was collected during the period of fall 2020 to spring 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed because of it, the data was gathered sporadically within this timeframe. Most of the interviews were conducted after the observations, which allowed me to ask questions relating to happenings that occurred during my participation in the field.

Interviews were conducted with 36 participants in total – 12 police officers, 16 private security guards and eight representatives from the Night Ravens. The 12 police officers were all employed at the same station. Their shifts are divided into three parts: event-driven, guarding, and proactive duties. It is, however, the proactive duty that forms the focus of this study, as the police units that undertake these shifts are actively focusing on order maintenance at nighttime. Moreover, eight of the PSGs were employed as bouncers, and eight were on mobile or area control. It is important to underline that although the focus of this research is on nighttime policing, all of the participants from the police and PSGs usually rotate their shifts, meaning that most of them have experience with daytime activities as well. The eight participants from the NRs were all affiliated with the same NR-group in Oslo city centre, usually participating in patrolling or 'hiking' by foot or in vehicles on Friday and Saturday nights.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured, which involved utilising an interview guide with prepared topics and questions, while simultaneously allowing for follow-up questions outside of the guide's main areas of focus, based on what the participant brought up in the interview setting. The main themes involved questions regarding their functions in the nightlife environment, how they contribute to preventing unwanted actions, relations to the public, and their perceptions of the opportunities and limitations within their role. The observational material comprises approximately 350 hours of following these entities at work. The data consists of observations of citizen-policing-actor encounters, as well as their descriptions of the relations to the public and how they strive to maintain order, as well as how they aim to prevent crime and respond to disorder, deviance and crime at nighttime. The interviews were transcribed and fieldnotes written after each observation. They were further analysed, with emphasis on similarities and differences between the participants' notions of power and order maintenance. The analysis was, as such, approached both thematically and comparatively, in terms of searching for both similar and dissimilar patterns in the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Halvorsen, 2008).

A description of the project, the extent of data collection and strategy for data processing were submitted to and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (SIKT). All participants consented to participate and to be quoted for research purposes. Personal information regarding the participants has been anonymized, and each participant is referred to with either "Police+number", "PSG+number" or "NR+number". Considering that the topic of the paper concerns citizen encounters, third parties are implicitly studied. None of these third parties consented to participate in the study and

nor were they aware that a researcher was present when they encountered the participating policing personnel. In order to secure anonymization, information regarding third parties, for instance personal characteristics such as gender, age-group, place of encounter with policing agency, etc., was not written down either in the fieldnotes or transcribed interview material. It should also be noted that while third parties are an indirect yet important component in this study, this paper focuses on policing bodies' comprehension of power and order maintenance work. As such, third parties' perspectives are not considered or discussed in the present paper.

Findings

In this section, the data is analysed to demonstrate how notions of power unfold in and underpin plural policing agencies' order maintenance work in the Norwegian nightlife. The analysis is divided by organisation, and the three sections illustrate the comprehensions of the respective agencies. The findings centre around how the representatives draw on legal frameworks and how they assess their ability to enforce norms or ensure order.

The police's perspective: Power as a legal tool you should strive not to use

As previously stated, power is seen as a core feature of the public police – made visible both through their presence as well as the ability to use force and coercion towards citizens (Martin & Bradford, 2021). In the nexus of power and order maintenance, the police point to the legal framework as significant for how they carry out order maintenance at nighttime:

It's very convenient to adhere to the police law, which we use a lot on weekends, that we can expel, remove, or detain individuals in order to hinder or prevent criminal offenses. That's what's stated in the police law, so in a way, it's an option that we've been given by the legislature, and it becomes very visible and often used on weekends. [...] It does happen that we don't get the opportunity to expel, or even if we do, the person may end up in a fight or something similar later anyway. (PO2)

Power is here viewed as a legal tool provided to the police, characterised as central to the public policing of nightlife. Moreover, the participant considers power as an option that they can choose to make use of as they hold the capacity to expel, remove, and detain individuals if deemed necessary. Despite this, the police also appear to be aware that power additionally unfolds through their presence, which also makes visible its intended effects:

We have a power pyramid in the police, on which presence sits at the bottom. We notice a significant difference here in the city if we manage to have police cars in the right places at the right times. Then we can prevent many acts of violence [...] It's rare for people to start fighting in front of a police car. It has happened, and it does happen, but the chance of starting a brawl in front of a police car is not something many people usually do. There are many more fights happening where there is no police presence. (PO36)

Here, the participant's notion of power is directly connected to the power pyramid (Lohne Lie & Lagestad, 2011). Beyond attempts to interrupt or hinder unwanted actions through their presence, it is emphasised that they have other means of power available that they

can draw on if necessary. The limitation of presence is made visible here as well, which is further highlighted when the police explain how there are certain blocks of time in the nighttime economy where being present is no longer enough to preserve order:

When there's a *release*, you have to be there. People are so drunk that physically being there is not necessarily even enough. You have to approach and manage people who are acting foolishly. The preventative job comes a bit bigger [for us during release]. [...] When we had missions that kept us away from the city when there was a release, statistically, we had a lot more disorderly incidents during the release and for the rest of the night than when we were there and present. We put our cap on, a smile, and say, "hey, how are you?", "oh, you look drunk, do you have someone who can help you?", "are you angry?", "don't argue here, don't play-fight, it's silly", all of that. (PO30)

The term 'release' is used to describe the time when bars in an area close and all customers are asked to leave. Even though presence and the potential power it symbolises is highlighted as a crucial feature of the actors' preventative work towards disorder at nighttime, it is not always sufficient to produce its desired outcome. The participant above implies that the police ascend on the power pyramid if presence itself does not work. As such, power is viewed as a feature that can escalate. This is also evident in the police's description of how they aim to use power in their work:

Resolving a mission without having to use physical force is always our goal. We don't always manage that, because it's not only up to us, but where we have the option of doing it, that's the goal [...] We have the option to use physical force, we are authorised to do this and that. But avoiding that will always be our goal. We have the power pyramid. What's the first step on the power pyramid? Well, it's communication. One step up is maybe issuing a directive. That's still at the communication stage. Or even just presence, that may be the lowest level. Simply being present in uniform is a form of exercising power. (PO43)

It has previously been highlighted that the notion of 'as little use of force as possible' is one of the reasons why the Norwegian police maintain their legitimacy among the population (Finstad, 2013). As such, the police emphasise that a part of their responsibility is to limit the use of force or physical power towards the public. However, also addressed in this statement is that the degree of the police's use of power depends on how people respond to it. Thus, in the public policing of nightlife, presence holds the potential to escalate into other direct uses of force. Power can be considered an escalating legal feature of police order maintenance work, given their strive to 'not use more power than necessary', to follow the steps on the power pyramid, as well as the notion that certain situations in the nightlife environment demand the use of communication, directives, and formal orders.

Private security guards' notions: In possession of a potentially (in)sufficient power

Despite the legal premises stating that PSGs lack a formal right to use force or coercion, private policing personnel can negotiate, withhold services, or threaten to evict in order to make the public comply with their instructions (see Button, 2007; Kammersgaard, 2021;

Mopasa & Stenning, 2001). While these features can be considered spatial power, one of the participants explains how they view this ability as a way of demonstrating authority:

We cannot exercise power, but we can demonstrate authority through our uniforms. Some of the people we interact with are unaware of how little or how much power we possess. Regardless, it could be beneficial for them to talk to someone other than the police, considering that the police formally have more power than other people. (Fieldnotes, PSG)

The statement suggests that the matter of power is of a relative volume: it is something actors may have 'little', 'some', or 'more' of. Furthermore, the view suggests that exercising power is distinctly different from demonstrating authority, and that both the form and amount of power an actor has influences how they are engaged with by members of the public. By comparison to the police, one of the security guards explained that while they lack police power, they could still be said to possess the ability to exert influence over nightlife attendees:

Even though we don't have the same power [as the police], there's still a lot we can do. And, let's say, the same as with the police car, if you have a security guard inside a nightclub, it's quiet around that security guard. Because everyone wants to be there, causing trouble means you're out. It's the same with the police, if you cause trouble with the police, okay, then you're banned from the city centre for 24 hours. So, it's about being seen, and making yourself seen [...]. There are several nightclubs in Oslo that don't have bouncers. And, if you don't have a bouncer, a lot of strange things can happen. But if you have a security guard there, okay, if something goes wrong, he's there. So just having a security guard or an authoritative person nearby does a lot for safety. (PSG7)

As this quote shows, the PSGs' position relative to the police is central for their use of power in the nighttime setting. There is a potential sanction for people who do not comply with the police's instructions: they can lose access to the city centre if the police decide to ban them from it. However, as the PSG describes, people can also lose access to the bar or nightclub if a PSG notices unwanted behaviour. Another interview underlines how the space within which they operate is of relevance in making people comply:

If we ask to see bags and things like that, people usually let us do it, but they also have the full legal right to refuse. They can refuse, but if you refuse, do you think you'll be allowed in by me? And we don't have any police authority per se, but we can ask, "Can I pat you down or look inside your bag?", "No, you can't look inside my bag". "Sorry, but then I can't let you in because I don't know what you have in your bag, so it's your choice, but you'll have to find another [nightclub] to go to." [...] Ninety-eight percent of those we ask open up and let us see without any problems. Then there are those who have something in there that they don't want the public to see, so they say no. I haven't yet experienced anyone saying, "No, you can't look inside", but they have every right to say no. But then you can't expect to be allowed in either. We have the law on our side there, since we can deny people entry. (PSG6)

This quote illustrates how PSGs comprehend a lack of legal basis to conduct a search of an individual's belongings, yet they are still able to influence the outcome of a situation (Button, 2007). While they specify that they do not have the duty nor the legal right to control a person by searching their bodies or belongings, bouncers can negotiate access to a search by withholding nightlife attendees' possibility to enter the nightclub. While the power in the scenario described above could be considered 'soft' in terms of negotiation (see Innes, 2005; Kammersgaard, 2021), the foundation of its practice is rooted in the premises of the landowner's rights. The legislation that gives landowners the right to deny entrance via bouncers is what provides a formal and legal basis for effectively exercising some form of power, yet the bouncer compares their legal basis to the rights of the police and therefore sees it as a lack of power. The comparison between PSGs and the police's power was also brought up by another participant:

We are not an emergency service, but we do manage emergencies. Considering that, we should have more [legal] rights. Not to gain power, but to protect ourselves. In that sense I think the legislation becomes guiding to our work, and what we do in the field is something else [...] Let's say someone is waving a knife around, threatening people. Should I just observe, or should I get involved? My empathetic side tells me to engage as it would cause something good. However, my job instruction does not require me to, but I want to contribute. We don't have any gear that protects us, like the police do. But do we handle many of the police's order maintenance tasks? Well, yes. (PSG22)

Balancing moral responsibility with professional requirements has previously been described as a potential conflict in the work of security personnel (Loader & White, 2018). The quote suggests that the PSG sees a contradiction between their tasks and the legislation that regulates their work: managing emergencies does not align with the legal means they have at their disposal. Here, the lack of a legal foundation to carry out services as a PSG is considered limiting in terms of self-protection – despite the fact that PSGs, according to Norwegian legislation, do have the legal right to protect themselves during an attack (Wegner, 2009). Furthermore, in cases where the police have that further option if the public does not comply with their instructions, the PSGs express that they are in a standstill:

It's different if we issue them a removal order: our [removal order] is just us saying "leave this place". It is based on the property owner's rights, so we can remove someone from a customer's property, but if they come back, they can't be punished. (PSG18)

The participant states that the PSGs have the right to expel people from their area, with reference to the property owner's rights. Even if removal is a means of power (Lomell, 2014), it is not a punishment in the form of a formal sanction. Moreover, of essence here in terms of the PSG's notions, is the expressed view that their strategies of order enforcement lack a potential formal consequence. Despite the potential engagement in withholding nightlife attendance for the public, it is not necessarily seen as influential or sufficient to ensure order.

The Night Ravens' perceptions: Neutral non-authorities

While the NRs have been visible in Norwegian streets to provide safety and mitigate unwanted activities since the 1990s, little is known about how they carry out their work. In terms of their power and role in order maintenance work, the NRs stress that they strive to avoid being authoritarian:

If we see something that's not okay, we indicate clearly that this is not okay. And if it escalates, we have to call the police. So, if we see it escalating, we ruin our reputation if we enter and become too authoritarian. Because then, next time, they might run away from us instead of staying when we arrive. (NR25)

When encountering or witnessing unwanted actions, the NRs highlight that they can reach out to other emergency personnel such as the police if their presence and offers of assistance are insufficient. Becoming an authoritarian figure conflicts with how they aim to interact with the public, and is further viewed as an obstacle in getting the public to comply with their instructions. As such, becoming 'too authoritarian' means that they potentially lose their ability to enforce norms in future situations. Despite the fact that the NRs distance themselves from an authoritarian label, they still recognise that they have a distinct role in the nightlife setting:

The yellow vest symbolises that you have a different role. I don't do this simply because I want to get involved in other people's business. It kind of represents something. [...] But we're somewhat dependent on people having a good relationship to our logo, or our concept, and knowing what it is. We have no authority, we're just people who care, and there are some that think it's stupid. "Why should you, an ordinary person, come here and bother me? Can't you just walk away? You have no authority here". (NR23)

As such, the NRs rely on public familiarity with their concept as well as cooperation from the public in order to have the effect they want. The peculiar position of the NRs is made visible here: they are both representing and separated both from "ordinary citizens". The volunteer component additionally contributes to their uniqueness: while the police and PSGs are hired to do specific tasks, the work of the NRs organisation is driven by a motivation to help others, which neither gives them a responsibility nor removes a responsibility from them. Despite this, they still undertake positions in nightlife policing that emphasise the symbolic function of their presence:

The driver stops the car outside of a nightclub and mentions that this area is known for a lot of trouble. One of the NRs leaves the car and says, "I'm just going to check with the bouncers what time the bar closes". He comes back and says, "the bouncer asks if we can stand on the upper side, because they have a release now, and then people will calm down". "Of course, we can do that", says the driver. (Fieldnotes, NR)

Even though standing outside of a bar during a release was not an NR initiative, their contribution was requested, and they accepted to take on a role where their presence could contribute to promoting order. In this case, the NRs became an addition to an already existing spectrum of authorities in the one space. The collective power that is reflected when all three actors work alongside each other, through what they symbolise

and represent, is as such perceived as ensuring that order is maintained. However, the NRs also stress that a premise for their assistance relies on consent:

I think that most people respect us and the work we do. Of course, some people don't care about anything or respect anyone, but most people do. And we notice that they consider us neutral, and that's what we want. Because we're not ambulance or police personnel, we're just volunteers. But we can still offer our help. Unless they don't want our help. We would never help someone that didn't want us to get involved. We always ask people if they want our help. But of course, if we see that someone is incapable of understanding that they need help, we will call someone and make sure that they get what they need. That's how we would approach such a situation. (NR17)

The broad spectrum of opportunities within the NRs' approach to the public is made evident here: while they on the one hand stress that consent should be obtained, they also have a power of definition in terms of identifying individuals that they consider incapable of recognising a need for help. Simultaneously, the NRs state that they additionally experience declining or choosing not to assist or help the public. One of the participants describes this as a breach of their personal boundaries:

If I say no to [assisting] people, or like, "Get it together, I don't like being spoken to that way", people are like "You can't say that because you're a Night Raven, you're supposed to be kind." A lot of people say that, "You have to be kind to me, you're a Night Raven!" and I'm like, "I can be kind to you, but not at any cost". I have personal integrity and rules, and I have boundaries. (NR3)

The NRs' limitations in legally established power, in terms of a lack of authority to demand that someone follow their instructions, can be experienced as a rejection by the citizens they interact with. As such, the quote above implies that the NRs perceive that they are expected to have a different role than other authorities in the nightlife setting: one that is supposed to be aiding the public. However, they still have the capacity to select when to offer their assistance:

A person approaches the Night Ravens and asks for a ride. The driver of the NR vehicle responds, "No, I'm a Night Raven, not a taxi." The driver is further asked if the NRs provide free rides, and responds, "No." The people leave, and the driver addresses the rest of the Night Ravens in the vehicle, saying, "We provide free rides for drunk people to the emergency room, yes." (Field notes, NRs)

In this situation, the NRs declined someone who asked for a ride on the basis that they do not perform this type of service. At the same time, the driver states to the other volunteers that they do provide rides in *some* contexts: their service is contextually contingent and reserved for people who are in need of it. As such, the NRs have a power of definition, which is expressed in how they determine who is deserving, or in need of, their assistance. In this sense, their power lies not in withholding services for some, but rather in offering assistance to others.

Discussion

This article has illustrated a broad spectrum of notions in plural policing agencies' comprehension of power and order. Overall, the article shows how power in policing has frameworks that can be anchored in both legality and the social context, which is evident in the participants' descriptions and practices. Drawing on the empirical material, power is understood both as a legal and relative feature – a function that holds contextual capacity, presupposes a legal basis, and is dependent on the public's perception of the power holder willingness to cooperate – and as a tool that potentially has limitations.

Comparatively examining the agencies' notions in this context reveals that the differences between their access to, use of, and comprehensions of power in order maintenance are clearly distinguishable: the police explicitly state that their presence is a way of exerting power, the PSGs stress that they represent authority, and the NRs distance themselves from a position of power. While their presence itself is viewed as a strategy to ensure order, the police additionally highlighting that when presence is not enough they can ascend according to the legal provisions in line with the power pyramid (Lohne Lie & Lagestad, 2011). This means that while the police's order enforcement potentially transforms or escalates, the PSGs perceive the demonstration of authority as their only capacity of power. The PSGs assert that the power they possess is rendered ineffective due to an absence of a formal authority to exercise it. While they still have some tools at their disposal, such as refusal of entry or eviction (Button, 2007; Lomell, 2014), this is not necessarily viewed as a strategy of performing power. The NRs, meanwhile, are cautious about their role as people who are neither ordinary citizens nor authoritative figures, highlighting that they ideally offer assistance to those determined to be in need, but that this presupposes public familiarity with their concept – as well as consent. As such, for the NRs, power dynamics are even more ambiguous: while they seek to avoid a label of authoritative or empowered altogether, they still contribute to determining 'order' when they agree to be positioned in strategic areas during a "release". To this effect, these notions illustrate how order is sought to be provided without the explicit or 'conscious' use of power (cf. Crawford, 2008).

Whereas the police state that they strive not to use their powers, the PSGs highlight that their lack of power could be both beneficial and disadvantageous to them, while the NRs strive to hand over the case to other personnel, such as the police, instead of taking on an authoritarian role. Again, if a strategy does not work, such as a show of presence or an interaction, the police can ascend on the power pyramid until people comply. However, when their aim is to maintain order, police officers emphasise their preference to avoid the use of force and instead focus on collaborating with the public. Using only minor coercive measures appears to be central for their perceived success in preventing incidents in the nightlife environment. In comparison, the PSGs see it as inconsequential if their instructions are not followed; they simply lack the means and resources to pursue a case any further. Additionally, the PSGs emphasise how their shortage of power occasionally could restrict them in ensuring order – and that this lack of power simultaneously could hinder their ability to protect themselves. Indeed, private and voluntary policing organisations are not provided with the same legal tools and powers as the police. This is a crucial aspect that must be taken into account when examining power in plural policing – as it also seems to shape perceptions of agency. However, it also implies another ambiguity regarding the legality of power: although legally provided the right to self-defence (Myhrer, 2011), the access to protection is still considered a feature of the public police by the PSGs.

It is evident that all three agencies view the outcomes of their collective efforts to maintain order as being dependent on the response of the citizens. Common to all three actors is the recognition that they hold the capacity of symbolising, representing and demonstrating power or authority relative to the citizens they interact with. It has previously been noted that police patrol work can be considered as a collaborative effort between those holding power and those subjected to it (Finstad, 2013). In that regard, the agencies' presence itself in the nightlife setting is occasionally comprehended as being sufficient to ensure order. However, in establishing this position, the PSGs and NRs underline that the public's potential (un)awareness of their power is essential, and additionally determining for how the encounter between policing actors and citizens unfold. The PSGs note that their lack of power can be beneficial for the public, and the NRs emphasise that public's familiarity with their volunteer work is essential, which suggests that their order maintenance function is relative and based on the public's comprehension of the policing agencies' power and influence (cf. Mopasa & Stenning, 2001).

The police, PSGs and NRs are all formal agencies that intentionally strive to preserve order in the nightlife setting. Intentional actions are indeed crucial in the exploration of plural policing and power, through the agencies' direct and indirect efforts to assure safety and order (Crawford, 2008). As the promotion of order can be characterised as 'an act of power' depending on the agencies' intentional effort to bring about a specific outcome (Dowding, 1996), power unfolds both implicitly and explicitly in the plural policing of nightlife. This occurs both through the explicit focus on norm enforcement, and additionally when the agencies implicitly ensure order without defined or concrete intervention towards the public. As such, power holds legal and social dimensions in parallel, which shows up in an ambiguous part of policing practices where legal regulation and social functions intersect. While the agencies' notion of power reveals ways that legality, self-protection, and the public's willingness to collaborate are characterised by tension, their perceptions comprise a few of many considerations in the normative debate on how policing should be conducted. As such, further exploration is needed to address the potential ambiguities of policing, while simultaneously ensuring that nightlife attendees' safety and rights are maintained.

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