

The Finnish Internet Police (Nettipoliisi): towards the development of a real cyber police

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the advantages and the practical and legal limits of the use of social media and computer technology in police services through the experience of the Finnish Internet police (Nettipoliisi). Particular attention is given to the use of social media as a medium of performing virtual community policing and as a tool to carry out ordinary police work.

Nettipoliisi started as a virtual community policing unit specialized in social media, but in time expanded its range of action, incorporating reactive and proactive functions. This shift is analysed in the second part of the article. The article is intended to create discussion and stimulate further research to find answers to the question whether it is possible to create a new type of law enforcement service, a cyber police operating on the Web with the same function and power of a regular police officer. Domestic and international legal issues involving cyber policing are taken into consideration and recommendations to lawmakers are given. Furthermore, the possibility of implementing the Nettipoliisi model to an international scenario is briefly examined.

Key words : virtual community policing; social media; cyber police; crime prevention; Nettipoliisi; Finland

INTRODUCTION

The Finnish Internet police (Nettipoliisi) was created inside the Finnish Police Service to be a unit with the capacity to take a peek into the world of social media. The goal was to explore the possibility of shifting some community policing activities from the streets to the Internet.

Nettipoliisi was developed by Sergeant Marko Forss in the Spring of 2008.^[5] In September of the same year Forss created the first police profile in the Finnish [social networking website](#) IRC-Galleria (EUCPN, 2009). Since then, Nettipoliisi's journey has taken some unexpected turns. It has evolved from a tool for closing the gap between the Finnish civilians and the police into a resource for traditional policing activities, such as pre-trial investigation and proactive operational efforts. At the same time, it has kept its initial function.

In this article the Finnish Nettipoliisi experience is analysed with multiple objectives. The first objective is to examine the modus operandi and results of Nettipoliisi in order to identify its success factors. The second one is to assess the potential development of the Nettipoliisi model in the light of current legal boundaries of the Finnish and international legislation. Finally, the third objective is to evaluate the possibility of implementing the model in other scenarios, including at an international level.

On a more general level, this article wants to serve the purpose of encouraging research towards the identification of a new category of police service: a cyber police, present on the Web, with the purpose of surveillance and with the same authority and possibilities of action as regular police officers.

The article is divided into several parts. The first section will present the relationship between social media and the police, and give a general overview of the impact of virtual community policing to police work. The main tools of the Finnish Police Service on the Web will be taken into consideration and commented upon. After this the research methods of the article will be illustrated. Then in section three the article will move to present the Nettipoliisi modus operandi and its results both as a virtual community policing unit and as a traditional policing unit. Following this, section four will focus on the development potential of the Nettipoliisi system. Some legal issues will be assessed and recommendations made. Finally the possibility of implementing the Nettipoliisi model on other scenarios will be addressed.

1. CONTEXT

1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLICE

The World Wide Web has evolved over the last two decades at a tremendous pace, allowing new forms of virtual human aggregation. New categories of Internet based social media, such as Facebook, have emerged and offer their members the possibility to interact with each other (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The functions of social media range from exchanging information of varying nature between users, to keeping in touch with friends, acquaintances, unknown people, organisations, groups, entities, and so on (Williams, Edwards, Housley, Burnap, Rana, Avis, Morgan & Sloan, 2013). Other types of usage are possible depending on the applications available on the media.

These kinds of platforms have evolved and diffused so much in the past years that they have given rise to changes in the habits and cultural perspectives of millions of people who have become active users (Wall & Williams, 2007).

Social media are tools designed to enhance their members' quality of life. Nevertheless, they have a downside. They are permeated with criminal activities, threats and dangers, which are potentially harmful even to experienced users. These include cyberbullying, phishing, fraud, sexual harassment, grooming and so on (Yar, 2012). Continuous patrolling of social media is currently difficult to organise for practical and legal reasons. In Finland, this is mostly due to privacy laws.

Until now investigations of criminal activities in cyberspace have usually begun with a reactive policing approach (Famega, 2009), after the police have been contacted by a victim or a third party. The need to review the current methods used in policing cyberspace has already been addressed in some of the literature (Jones, 2007). It is clear, that a reactive approach cannot guarantee crime prevention.

1.2 A THEORETICAL SCHEMATIZATION OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITY POLICING

Prior to examining the Finnish approach to Internet policing it seems appropriate to identify within a conceptual framework what virtual community policing is, and how it differs from the more common and traditional forms of community policing (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988). The following description is a mere theoretical approach to the matter. It is limited in its scope: it is a simplified presentation of the various community policing models. These models are presented to better explain the strategies of action and the patterns of the Finnish system, which will be discussed later. Community policing is a concept that is difficult to define due to the different approaches that police services have adopted through the years. A large part of the relevant literature identifies the concept as the area of policing that focuses on the development of interaction between police services and the community (Oliver & Bartgis, 1998).

Community policing in practice is one of the simplest ways to ensure an immediate form of crime prevention. [6]

Some national police forces have practised community policing for a long time (Virta, 2002), but it is just recently that the need to form operational community policing taskforces has received general recognition in literature on policing at a global level (Sozer & Merlo, 2012; van Steden, Miltenburg & Boutellier, 2014).

Several different forms of community policing are practised around the world, some of which are markedly different from others (Dammer & Albanese, 2011). In any event, the traditional approaches involve the need to be constantly visible on the streets and to be able to communicate with the public. This requires a vast amount of resources (Chappell, 2009), officers and a sharp strategic plan to obtain results.

In time community policing has had a concrete impact on the police world, allowing a reduction of crime rates in specific geographic locations and areas (MacDonald, 2002). Thus nowadays there is a growing need to evaluate and research the key points relating to the deployment of police officers. Community policing should operate not only in certain urban areas but it should reach all centres of human interaction, whether real or virtual.

When taking a virtual approach in community policing effectiveness increases significantly. Within a short timeframe a single officer can handle various tasks, such as communicating, sharing information and helping more than one individual in different geographical areas. At the virtual level, community policing can be centralised, as the officer's duties can be performed in a single location.

The basic differences between traditional and virtual community policing are shown by the models in the figure 1:

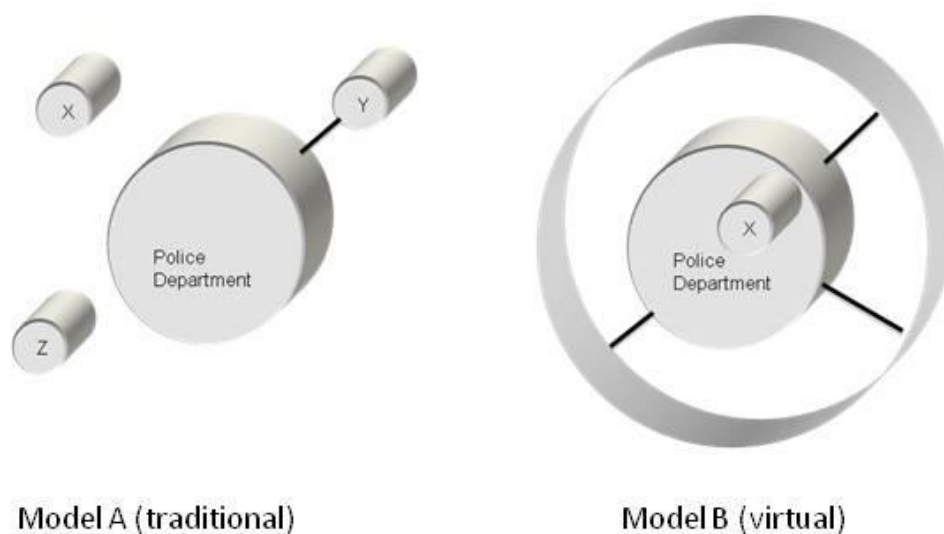


Figure 1: *Traditional and virtual community policing models*

Model A represents traditional community policing, also known as 'district policing' which is used, for example, in Germany (Mesko, Fields, Lobnikar & Sotlar, 2013). The large circle represents the police department and the small circles represent the police officers sent to different locations to perform community policing duties. In order to ensure effective interaction between the police and civil society, the police officer needs to be in the right place at the right time (Gabaldón a & Briceño, 2013; van Caem, van Steden, Boutellier, & van Stokkom, 2013). Only at that point will there be a connection (black line) between the police and civil society (Glaser & Denhardt, 2010).

It is easy to waste valuable resources when taking the traditional approach. The crime prevention function is limited to the geographical location of the police officer at any given time. Traditional community policing has a high risk of not achieving good results, varying from area to area (Kerley & Benson, 2000).).

Model B represents the virtual approach. In this case, the officer (small circle) stays inside a facility, such as a local police headquarters (wider circle), and reaches the cyber-community just by logging into a computer. Connections between the police and civil society do not depend on the officers' geographical location, but merely on their existence. There is no waste of resources since every police officer can use his or her full potential to create an impact. The connections (black lines) are more frequent because every responsive citizen will be alert to the presence the police. The function of crime prevention is continuous in time and space. The activities performed in virtual community policing are visible to all individuals on the Web and remain in the cyberspace as long as necessary.

Being present on the Internet aids the police to receive information. This is due to the fact that the officers are easily contactable. Additionally, it is easier for the officers to locate individuals who want to assist them. This means that a unit performing virtual community policing has the potential to evolve at any time into a reactive or proactive force. This capacity will be discussed in detail when the results of the Finnish Nettipoliisi are presented later in the text. Furthermore, on the Web it is possible to stumble upon relevant information for police investigations left by unaware users (Trottier, 2012).

Consequently, the formula of "policing through crime prevention" seems a particularly apt way to define this *modus operandi*. Virtual community policing can be considered as a new kind of community policing rather than a simple change of strategic location.

There is also a third approach, shown in figure 2. This is a hybrid model between the traditional and the new virtual community policing. In this case a police officer (small circle) uses social media to reach a particular target group:



Model C (hybrid)

Figure 2: *Hybrid community policing model*

In model C the purpose of community policing is limited to a certain category of people, as in the traditional approach, but it remains continuous in time, as in the virtual approach.

Models B and C will be further explained in the context of Finland in section 1.3. The different approaches of each model to community policing correspond approximately to the *modi operandi* of the Nettipoliisi and the Nettilähipoliisi units, respectively.

1.3 THE FINNISH WAY OF ACTION: NETTIVINKKI, NETTILÄHIPOLIISI AND NETTIPOLIISI

The Finnish police service has developed through the years three ways of acting on the Internet, through three different entities: Nettivinkki[7], Nettilähipoliisi and Nettipoliisi.

The Nettivinkki ("net tip") system consists of a database with a user-friendly software form created for citizens who wish to report a crime or other relevant information to the police. The Nettivinkki system is managed by the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation (Keskusrikospoliisi), which is an agency of the National Police of Finland[8].

The second entity, Nettilähipoliisi ("local Internet police"), has been developed in order to create a technological unit that specialises in the use of social media as a tool in mainstream police work. Nettilähipoliisi works on three different levels: as a community policing unit, as an investigative unit, and as a patrolling unit. Social media are mostly used as means of conducting traditional police operations both inside and outside the Web. Members of this unit seek to connect with particular target groups through social media platforms, for example in order to get in touch with individuals engaged in demonstrations or other risky activities. The purpose is to observe them and to prevent extremist acts (Baker, 2013).

Nettilähipoliisi gained public attention when operating as a community policing unit in a recent Finnish Greenpeace demonstration. The entire event was documented by police officer Pekka Hätönen through his Facebook profile, using hashtags such as '#freethearctic30', '#greenpeacesuomi', '#helsinki' and '#poliisi'. This event was highly visible and it made an impact in the country. It was reported in national newspapers as being the first occasion on which the police had approached a public demonstration using a twofold strategy (Helsingin Sanomat, 2013). Police officers were present at the demonstration to maintain security and at the same time produced a kind of virtual community policing action in the social media by posting reports about the protest. It is possible to come to the conclusion that Nettilähipoliisi is a typical implementation of the hybrid model C mentioned in the previous section 1.2.

The third and final entity, Nettipoliisi (Internet police), originated as a means of increasing interaction between law enforcers and civil society through social media. It was intended for virtual community policing and it is a good example of the model B mentioned in the previous section 1.2.

In conclusion, the Finnish police has used the virtual approach to community policing in an extensive manner, including both the implementation of a pure model of virtual community policing (Nettipoliisi) and of a hybrid one of the traditional and virtual approaches

(Nettilähipoliisi). The virtual approach to community policing has been developed extensively in Finland and it covers nearly all types of community policing activities.^[9] In contrast, traditional community policing has almost been abandoned in the country, and for quite some time (Holmberg, 2006).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to ascertain the most common community policing practices of several national police forces, the relevant literature on the field of community policing has been examined. Particular attention has been given to the search of potential weaknesses in the current general *modus operandi*. The aim was to evaluate whether the Finnish virtual community policing approach is sufficient enough to fill some of the voids left by the traditional community policing.

The data was collected directly from the Finnish Police Service. The analysis has been conducted in tight collaboration with the Finnish Police Service, in particular with Nettipoliisi. Several interviews have been made with Sergeant Marko Forss. The focus was to investigate the impact of his work on the Finnish society, and how Nettipoliisi's *modus operandi* has changed throughout the years. Relevant anecdotes and events are used in the analysis section to explain the psychological effects of this new form of community policing and cyber policing on the Finnish social media users.

Lastly, the current legal frameworks in matters of Internet law, police law and police investigation have been examined in order to explore the possibilities of further development of Nettipoliisi in Finland.

3. MODUS OPERANDI AND RESULTS OF NETTIPOLIISI

3.1 THE MODUS OPERANDI OF NETTIPOLIISI

Nettipoliisi is a unit formed by three police officers: Sergeant Marko Forss, Senior Constable Jutta Antikainen and Senior Constable Jarno Saarinen.

In order to get a more detailed perspective it is useful to examine the daily work of the officers in the platform of Facebook. This shows how the virtual community policing activities are carried out in practice on social media on daily basis.

Paradoxically, what makes the Facebook profiles of the Finnish Nettipoliisi officers peculiar is that their accounts are similar to those of millions of other users. ^[10] Having a personal profile, as opposed to a generic fan page for a police unit or a department, is the key in closing the gap between the police and the public.

Officers write regularly on their Facebook timeline, more or less two or three times a week. Posts and comments usually deal with generic issues, relating to police work on the Internet, various thoughts on Finnish or international trends in criminal law and even comments about the news. Interaction with other users is informal, friendly and manages to give the

police a human face. Furthermore, the Nettipoliisi profiles are public, which means that every Facebook user may view the pages without having the status of "friend" or "follower".

The public side of Nettipoliisi's Facebook profiles represent the core of the virtual community policing activity. Yet, the private messages received by Nettipoliisi officers may contain information to activate either reactive or proactive police operations, such as criminal investigations.

To protect and guarantee privacy Nettipoliisi has recently launched a new service called Turva-chat ("secure-chat"). Through this channel police officers can converse in a confidential manner with individuals who wish to give the police sensitive information, for instance, about sexual abuse. When an individual contacts an officer online in order to communicate sensitive information, a disposable link is sent from the police to him/her. By clicking the link, the individual is directed to Turva-chat for one-on-one online discussion. The system offers a secure way of discussing sensitive matters. In addition, the information received from the chat is saved directly on the police server. This makes it possible to use the information in later investigations easily.^[11]

Another interesting tool developed by Nettipoliisi is the so-called "virtual warning". This has been created against cyberbullying and to stop deviant conduct as soon as it starts to take place. The assumption is that a warning from a police officer, even online, is usually sufficient to make individuals desist from unlawful or disrespectful conduct.

3.2 PERFORMANCE AS A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY POLICING UNIT

A quick evaluation of the effectiveness of Nettipoliisi as a virtual community policing unit can be done by measuring its popularity among the social media users. This can be quantified by counting the number of Facebook friends and followers of Nettipoliisi. Sergeant Marko Forss has currently 5,000 friends, which is the maximum amount allowed by Facebook for a single user. Additionally, on 30 October 2014 the account was followed by 28,259 people. This indicates that a large percentage of Finland's 5.3 million citizens are in touch with Sergeant Forss. This conclusion is based on the assumption that each of the 28,259 followers will likely possess approximately 100 to 200 Facebook friends of their own, who will be able to view the communication between the initial followers and Sergeant Forss. This estimate could be conservative, as recent research indicates that the average number of Facebook friends per user could be more than 300 (Dello Iacovo, 2013). In 2014 there were approximately 2.6 million Facebook users in Finland ^[12]. Therefore, if every follower of Forss's profile possesses on average 90 exclusive Finnish Facebook friends, virtually the entire Facebook population of Finland would be within two degrees of separation of Sergeant Forss.

The profiles of the other two Nettipoliisi officers have a rather small number of followers and friends when compared to Forss's.

Furthermore, the number of messages sent and received through Facebook with the addition of the number of exchanged e-mails can be used as indicators of performance and measure

operative results. When discussing Facebook messages, it should be kept in mind that they can be considered as "chains of messages". They appear more like a conversation than a singular message.

The diagram in figure 3 shows the evolution of the messages and e-mails exchanged with and by Nettipoliisi from 2010 until 2013. The numbers are related to the total values reached in each year.

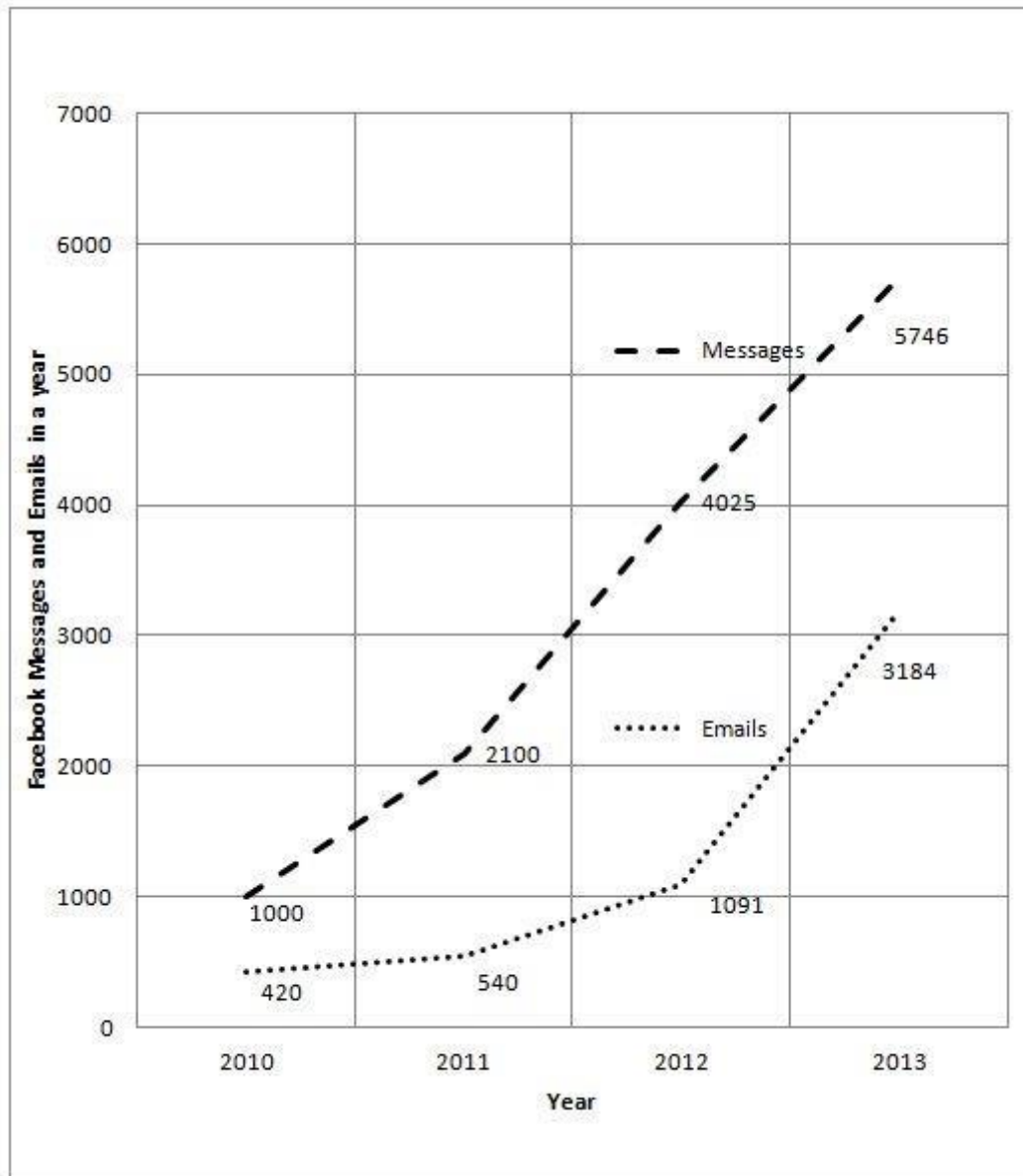


Figure 3: *Nettipoliisi virtual community policing performance*

The diagram shows that people's interest towards Nettipoliisi is increasing. The most recent results can be considered significantly high: 5746 messages and 3184 e-mails were exchanged in 2013. This means that every day more than 24 active connections (approximately 16 messages and 8 e-mails) were established between Finnish police and Internet users through Nettipoliisi.

3.3 RESULTS OF POLICING ACTIVITIES

Continuous interaction with users of social media has produced a natural shift of Nettipoliisi activities towards traditional policing. The results have been rather significant, as reported in the following Table 1.

The table displays in aggregate the annual activities of Nettipoliisi in the years 2010 to 2013. In order to provide more detailed information, similar actions have been grouped together in the following classes: virtual warnings, assistance to other police officers, police reports, reports to child welfare and tips.

		YEAR			
		2010	2011	2012	2013
TOTAL POLICE ACTIONS		139	246	314	326
D E T A I L	Virtual warnings	28	50	107	142
	Assistance to other police officers		46	54	61
	Police reports (Sexual crimes)	22 (17)	55 (51)	36	20 (11)
	Reports to child welfare	9	14	7	4
	Tips	about 70	about 70	94	77

Source: interviews with Marko Forss and Nettipoliisi pages in Finnish Police website

(<https://www.poliisi.fi/nettipoliisi>) Note: 2010 data include only last 7 months

Table 1 : Nettipoliisi: results assimilable to real policing activities - totals and detail

The performance of the unit seems encouraging, especially when certain facts are taken into consideration. First, Nettipoliisi consists of only three officers and the unit has been created rather recently. Second the original purpose of the unit was to focus on virtual community policing tasks, thus, the results relevant to real policing activities can be to an extent considered as an "accidental" outcome. Additionally, the Nettipoliisi method is innovative and it may have undeveloped potential to be expanded towards working with a wider community.

3.4 ANALYSING THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE MODUS OPERANDI

After few years of activity some elements of Nettipoliisi have been identified as its key success factors.

The first key factor is, that Nettipoliisi officers make an effort to create a solid bond with social media users. The difference between Nettipoliisi and other forms of crime control or law enforcement present on the Internet is that Nettipoliisi officers do not seize the platform

when searching for information (Williams, Edwards, Housley, Burnap, Rana, Avis, Morgan & Sloan, 2013). Instead, they become part of it. Nettipoliisi officers learn skills when patrolling the Web, while at the same time users can benefit from their counselling: it is a *do ut des* relationship.

Nettipoliisi officers have created trust^[13] and social cohesion with their social media "friends" and are in continuous interaction with them. Such a sincere relationship is the key for attracting individuals who possess information,^[14] which may be useful, for instance, in pre-trial investigations or in so-called "cold cases". Such information can be difficult to obtain in other ways.

In addition to trust, the police unit focuses on creating *emotional* bonds with social media users. ^[15] The aim is to lower the level of discomfort experienced by individuals in the process of informing the police about personal and/or shameful issues. A significant number of individuals are affected by a degree of shyness when the need to report a crime arises (Kääriäinen & Sirén, 2011). Others feel uncomfortable talking to the police about sensitive issues.^[16] A friendlier environment in which a report can be given is *ipso facto* a necessity especially when the victims are or feel vulnerable.

The last factor to be taken into consideration, in order to analyse the performance of Nettipoliisi, is practical experience. Working full time in social media helps an officer to develop an eye for this specific environment (Cockbain, Brayley & Laycock, 2011). For example, an officer can learn to spot various red-flag communications or behaviour on the Web and identify whether a level of substantial concern has been reached. Consequently, the officer can initiate further police activity and, for instance, prevent violent crimes like school shootings or mass killings (See e.g. Randazzo, 2008; Sund, 2009; Arnkil & Eriksson, 2009).

4. THE DEVELOPMENTAL POTENTIAL OF NETTIPOLIISI

Nettipoliisi has established itself as a significant actor in community policing on the virtual level. Its effectiveness may lead it to be compared with the operational police patrol on the streets. However, various issues may prevent it from developing into a fully-fledged cyberspace police. These issues are assessed and various proposals are made for the adjustment of the relevant legal frameworks, while taking into account the need to balance different interests.

The legal issues involving Nettipoliisi can be divided essentially in two different subcategories: external and internal.

The external legal issues refer to regulations that do not deal directly with police institutions, but indirectly affect their activity. In contrast, internal legal issues refer to regulations directly governing the structure and function of the police service.

If these legal issues are taken into consideration by lawmakers in the future, Nettipoliisi will be able to perform its tasks in a more suitable environment, obtain better results and officially evolve into a low policing taskforce with reactive and proactive duties. It could

undergo a shift from being "Internet police", a police located on the Web, to become a new form of "cyber police", a true virtual police, with officers who conduct their duties on the Web.

4.1 THE EXTERNAL LEGAL ISSUES

In the category of external legal issues the main obstacle is represented by the norms and regulations concerning protection of privacy.

The conflict between the need to serve the public interest by investigating crimes and the need to protect individuals' privacy may give rise to impasses for Nettipoliisi's activities. Some general examples of critical situations can be given regarding both the reactive and proactive activities of Nettipoliisi. In relation to the reactive activities, challenging conditions arise when a Nettipoliisi officer receives a private message containing a chat between the sender and a third person. Under chapter 8, article 1 of the Finnish Coercive Measures Act (Pakkokeinolaki), even if the text contains evidence of a crime, Nettipoliisi can use it only if the maximum punishment for the suspected crime is at least six months' imprisonment. As a consequence, most of the time Nettipoliisi officers can give advice but cannot take any further action.

When discussing external legal issues surrounding Nettipoliisi's proactive activity, two typical situations can be cited. According to the article 17 of the Finnish Act on Utilisation of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media (Laki sananvapauden käyttämisestä joukkoviestinnässä) (460/2003, SVL), if a public Internet forum contains evidence of an insult amounting to a criminal offence, or some message of an illegal nature or with illegal content, Nettipoliisi has three months to find the offender's Internet Protocol (IP) address. Secondly, if the police want to find an IP address that may be relevant to an investigation, the maximum penalty for the crime must be at least two years or the crime must have the characteristics of an illegal threat. This is dictated in the recently reviewed Coercive Measures Act (Uusi pakkokeinolaki) (806/2011).

Privacy protection regulations have also contributed to the *dispositif* regulating the relationships between different police units inside the police service. There are difficulties in centralising information obtained from the Web by the different Finnish national police entities.

The Finnish Data Protection Ombudsman (Tietosuojavaltuutettu) has clearly indicated that Nettivinkki should be the only database for information gained from the Web. Difficulties arise, because Nettivinkki can be handled only by one police unit, the National Bureau of Investigation (Keskusrikospoliisi). Consequently, a great deal of information is lost every month. In addition, Nettilähipoliisi and Nettipoliisi cannot share their information on a common platform. If Nettivinkki, Nettilähipoliisi and Nettipoliisi data were combined, more information could be elaborated.

Tipping the scale more towards the public interest and placing less emphasis on the protection of privacy is becoming a necessity in order to allow an optimal and effective response to offences occurring on the Internet. Social media have changed the cyber world

and the current regulations regarding privacy have been made partly obsolete. There is a growing urge for lawmakers to take into consideration new practical rules to facilitate law enforcement.

Nevertheless, there is no need to carry out a comprehensive reform relating to protection of privacy, but a relatively small adjustment would be enough to facilitate the needs of police units. These regulations should be made at least at the European Union level. This is for two reasons.

The first reason is a practical one. At the moment a large amount of alarming information and complaints for Nettipoliisi come from Finns using Internet Service Providers (ISP) outside of Finland. For example, Ask.fm is a site visited by many young people. A considerable amount of bullying conducted on the site has been reported. The server of Ask.fm is located in Latvia where defamation is not illegal, which means that Nettipoliisi cannot obtain IP address information from the managers of the ISP responsible (Specchio, 2012).

Secondly, several issues concerning fundamental rights and the principle of proportionality may arise even if just a small intervention is required. A careful and uniform approach during the legislative process is required when regulating on matters of privacy.

4.2 THE INTERNAL LEGAL ISSUES

Internal legal issues mainly revolve around the concept of how a police officer has to be identified according to the Finnish legislation. The relevant question is whether a police officer logged in on social media as a member of Nettipoliisi can be identified as a police officer. This question has some practical and legal consequences. Being officially recognised as a law enforcer allows a police officer to perform particular duties. Thus, an officer who is not on duty or cannot properly identify him/herself cannot perform these tasks.

The question of whether a Nettipoliisi officer is a "real" officer is particularly relevant in three circumstances on the Web.

First, the refusal to answer to a pursuant police officer according to article 1, section 2 of the Finnish Police Act (Poliisilaki) is punishable. A situation could arise where there are good grounds to suspect that a cybercrime has been committed, and a virtual police officer therefore asks a social media user hiding behind an username to identify him/herself. In such circumstances the individual might refuse to do so, claiming that the Nettipoliisi profile is not a real police officer.

Further, refusal to obey a command given by a police officer under article 11, section 1 of Poliisilaki is considered an offence. For example, an individual on the Web suspected of having relevant information about a crime committed on the Internet might refuse to divulge it to a Nettipoliisi officer.

Last, knowingly giving false information about one's identity to a police officer under article 5, section 16 of the Finnish Criminal Act (Rikoslaki) (19.12.1889/39) is a crime.

The power to pursue individuals who deliberately fail to assist a police officer in these three circumstances directly through Facebook or other social media would give Nettipoliisi a wider range of action. It would also mark the shift in the function of Nettipoliisi from virtual community policing to a patrolling operational taskforce.

As previously stated, the *conditio sine qua non* for Nettipoliisi to be able to carry those activities is for each officer to be identifiable as a police officer when connected to social media. The relevant regulation is laid down in article 8, chapter 1, of, Poliisilaki (872/2011Annettu Naantalissa 22 päivänä heinäkuuta 2011) [17]. This article explicitly states that, in order to be identifiable as a law enforcer, a police officer must show a badge when requested by an individual who is the subject of a police action.

Of course, this is impossible in cyberspace. On the other hand, a member of Nettipoliisi is undoubtedly a real police officer, paid to carry out police duties on the Internet, thus, there is an official recognition *ab origine*. Since a Nettipoliisi officer is a law enforcer who carries out work in cyberspace, their Internet activity is not a free discretionary choice but a functional duty.

The Finnish police website[18] contains a list of the officers operating on the Web, but this seems to be for informational purposes rather than being legally binding. The Poliisilaki regulation places particular emphasis on the idea that a police officer must be able to officially identify him/herself using a physical badge when acting as a law enforcer. For this reason, while Nettipoliisi officers clearly are working as police officers, they do not yet meet the requirements of being able to provide evidence of their status as law enforcers to citizens.

This problem could be overcome by making police officers' Facebook profiles official, for example, by creating a new category of social media users, with an identification sign that could be used as a virtual badge. In this way, the officer could be unequivocally identified. There is a need for tighter collaboration between social platforms and the police. Creating certified profiles for the police on social media, which are easily identifiable and advertised, could be a legitimate substitute for the physical badge required under article 8 of Poliisilaki.

It is useful to specify that blue verified badges are already envisaged by the Facebook and Twitter platforms to recognize the authenticity of certain profiles. [19] The three officers of Nettipoliisi already possess the blue verified badge. This means that Facebook users are able to recognize that the Facebook profiles of the officers are operated by the officers themselves. These blue badges seem to have only an informative value, certainly not a legal one. The virtual badge for police officers proposed in this article would instead aim to give the Facebook profiles a proper legal recognition with a double purpose. The first would be the already existing one of certifying the authenticity of the Facebook profile. The second would be signalling the users of Facebook that the authentic profiles of the officers have a direct connection with the relevant police unit. In order to ensure that the connection is real, the authentication should be certified not only by the social media platform, but also implemented in the proper police regulations.

In any event, the issue of giving legal power to Internet profiles is not new. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have pushed the idea of making Facebook profiles official and allowing them to be used for public service purposes on the Internet (BBC, 2012). Such a step could mark a milestone in the process of identification of an Internet profile as an avatar of a person, possessing legal status, rights and obligations. At that point, it would not be difficult to imagine that if a civilian can acquire legal status on the Web the same could happen to police officers conducting their duties.

5. PROSPECTS OUTSIDE OF FINLAND

The various agencies and organizations involved in the field of international police cooperation seem to underestimate the gap between administrative entities and civilians. Their efforts focus on the process of cooperation between police entities and the development of tools to connect police forces (Bowling & Sheptycki, 2012). While this is understandable, it may preclude the adoption of other effective strategic approaches directed towards global civil society.

The Nettipoliisi model could fit into entities operating at international level, such as INTERPOL. The adoption of such a model in a transnational or international level would offer several new possibilities for police cooperation agencies and organisations.

These types of organisations usually need to obtain quickly relevant information to initiate cooperation on crimes. The information usually comes from local police bureaus and it is ultimately passed up to the international level (Martha, 2010). Individuals who have information about transnational crimes are required to contact their national or local police force, and rarely have the opportunity to contact the cooperation centre itself. The local police services have the faculty to initiate international cooperation. Problems arise either because some countries have inefficient criminal justice systems (Calcara, 2013) or because people do not trust some national police forces (Davis, Henderson & Merrick, 2010). This leads to loss of data, while criminal activities continue to flourish. For instance, when travellers witness a serious crime in a foreign country, they may not want to or have the ability to inform the local police due to lack of language skills or trust.

Another point worth being mentioned is that most of the criminal activities on the Web are of transnational nature. The adoption of a system similar to Nettipoliisi managed by an international police unit could centralise information reported by citizens in respect of potential criminal activities on and outside the Web. Sharing such information directly with international entities could avoid the danger of national police forces underestimating the value of important clues on cases distant from their jurisdiction or due to lack of adequate knowledge (Akdeniz, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The Nettipoliisi model created in Finland has its strong points. It is easily implantable system with a simple structure. It requires few resources and it has been proven to be efficient in the field in Finland. It can coexist with other taskforces that operate in the cyberspace; this is shown by the simultaneous existence of Nettipoliisi with Nettilähipoliisi.

Due to these elements the model could be taken into consideration by other national police services.

It will be interesting to see how this system will evolve in Finland, and perhaps eventually elsewhere. As already pointed out, Nettipoliisi could be moulded into a "real" cyber police unit. Its officers could possess the same powers, duties and authority as the uniformed police officers operating on the streets.

It is certain that, as long as people continue to transfer a large part of their lives into the virtual world, there will be a requirement for the police services to conduct part of their activity there and patrol it in order to create a sense of security.

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[5] [https://www.poliisi.fi/poliisi/helsinki/home.nsf/files/83E699F3955236FCC2257A9500318EE4/\\$file/kotisivueng.ppt](https://www.poliisi.fi/poliisi/helsinki/home.nsf/files/83E699F3955236FCC2257A9500318EE4/$file/kotisivueng.ppt)

[6] While there is still some debate as to the difficulty of proving the degree of effectiveness of community policing, the general consensus is that crime prevention is cheaper for society than activating the machinery of criminal justice after a crime has been committed (Garland, 2001; Smith & Tilley, 2005).

[7] <https://www.poliisi.fi/nettivinkki>

[8] <https://www.poliisi.fi/krp>

[9] The main reason is because Finland is particularly fit for implementation of virtual community policing due to the characteristics of the country. Finland's population is relatively small and scarcely scattered: 5,268,799 citizens live on a 338,145 square kilometre area. Thus, the country has a population density of a less than 16 persons per square kilometre, while the average population density in European Union countries is approximately 118. Several small communities exist far from the urban areas, and remain difficult to reach especially during winter season. Most important, the informatisation level in the society is high.

[10] The Facebook profile of Sergeant Marko Forss can be found at:
<https://www.facebook.com/marko.f.forss>.

[11] More information can be found at:
<https://www.poliisi.fi/poliisi/home.nsf/pages/E6FCBA0F234623DCC2257C510042A117?opendocument>

[12] <http://www.statista.com/statistics/283662/finland-number-of-facebook-users/>

[13] The concept of the importance of trust in policing is hardly new (Spalek, 2010). Nettipoliisi attempts to evoke this type of trust through its actions. According to the Police Barometer of the Ministry of the Interior (2012), 92% of people in Finland trust the police. However, a section of the population has antagonistic feelings towards the police. Members of this group are usually a part of the younger generation, mainly under 25 years of age. Nettipoliisi is trying to reach this section of the Finnish population by starting random, informal chats. Even though the early signs are not hopeful, continuing these conversations may bring the much sought after results. The pattern of confrontation leading to cooperation between police and civil society is already recognized in the relevant literature. (van de Klomp, Stronks, Adang & van den Brink, 2014).

[14] Messages and information about sexual crimes that have nothing to do with the Internet are constantly being received. There is a piece of data, which is particularly relevant when evaluating the impact of the unit. According to Nettipoliisi, 15 to 20% of all the cases involving child sexual abuse on the Internet in 2011 were reported through the unit (Nettipoliisi, 2012).

[15] According to research, even deep emotional connections can be originated from simple interactions on the Web (Welch & Fulla, 2006). This is a fairly new psychological phenomenon, which is beginning to dominate online communication worldwide.

[16] Sexual crimes are a good example of the problem. A survey made by Nettipoliisi in collaboration with Save the Children Finland (2011) presented the following findings: "*Sex crimes committed online rarely reported to the police: 45% of all respondents under 16 had told no one about it (44% of girls and 48% of boys). In cases where the matter had been reported, it was mainly girls (57%) who had told their friends. Boys open up to friends more rarely (29%), but on the other hand had more often taken the matter to the police (17%), their parents (29%) and other professionals.*"

[17] The law entered into force on 1 January 2014. Article 8 states in its original language: '8 § Poliisimiehen aseman ilmaiseminen ja poliisimiehen yksilöiminen / Poliisimiehen on tarvittaessa ilmaistava toimenpiteen kohteena olevalle henkilölle olevansa poliisimies ja pyynnöstä esitettävä virkamerkkinsä, jos ilmaiseminen tai esittäminen on mahdollista toimenpiteen suorittamista vaarantamatta. / Poliisin on huolehdittava siitä, että virkatoimen suorittanut poliisimies on tarvittaessa yksilöitävissä'.

[18] <http://www.poliisi.fi/virtuaalinenlahipoliisi>

[19] For more information on the already existing blue verified badges see the following websites: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/119135-faqs-about-verified-accounts> and <https://www.facebook.com/help/196050490547892>