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# PROTECTING EUROPEAN BORDERS: CHANGING BORDER POLICE COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

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## ABSTRACT

The recent influx of migrants and asylum seekers in Europe has drawn our attention towards the future of Schengen and European border politics. In 2014-2015 a European collaborative project called Turnstone (partly funded by the European commission)

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was implemented to increase control of European borders in the Baltic Sea area and to diminish trans-boundary criminality. The purpose of the project is also to increase cooperation between border, police and coast guard officers in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden. The officers argue that the abolition of internal borders and the implementation of the Schengen regime in the EU has led to increased efforts to control and monitor borderlands and border crossings. The border officers must rely on cooperation to perform their duties of border guarding and hence must change their methods of working. This is a qualitative study based on empirically gathered material such as field interviews and fieldwork observations at the different border agencies. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the staff of the different organizations defines successful collaboration and what collaboration obstacles they have identified during the implementation of the cooperation project. The findings suggest that the border officers re-negotiate spatial and cultural identities to make cooperation possible. The idea of common northern European historical identity is described as important for successful cooperation. At the same time, language and communication difficulties, differences in work practices and national legislation, differences in status and different areas of interest are seen as collaboration obstacles. However, the border officers are united in their views and efforts to protect EU territory and Schengen space from external threat and criminal activity.

**Key words:** *Europe, border police, protecting borders, Baltic Sea area, Schengen*

## Introduction

Project Turnstone is a northern European project aiming to increase close control in the Baltic Sea area to decrease cross-border crime<sup>1</sup>. The background of the project is the EU and Schengen agreement, implying a greater need for international police and border guard cooperation. The abolition of borders is argued to serve as a possible security risk, and the absence of borders makes the detection of criminals at border controls more challenging (Faure Atger, 2008, p. 7). Borders previously governed and monitored by passport controls must now rely on cooperation between the border officers, who need to adapt to new methods of working. Within the framework of national legislation, the border officers often rely on neighbouring countries to perform their job duties and fight trans-boundary criminality. This

cooperation entails the emergence of new police, coast, and border guard networks beyond the national police stations. Project Turnstone responds to these needs. Although cooperation between border authorities in the EU and Schengen area is not a new phenomenon, the goal of the project is to achieve a new level of cooperation. In the Turnstone model of working, cooperation is strengthened by a closebilateral work relationship between individual organizations and border, police, and coast guard officers.

The nations participating in Project Turnstone are Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In addition, a research group from the Department of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden, is participating in the project with the purpose of writing the present article. The researchers will also produce a report focusing on ferry and airport passengers' perspectives of safety and border crossing

<sup>1</sup> <https://polisen.se/PageFiles/487243/Information.pdf>.

(Yakhlef, Basic, and Åkerström 2015 a,b). The aim of this study is to define and analyse cooperation practices among police and border agencies in the northern part of the Baltic Sea region. Based on qualitatively gathered material, the study maps and analyses how the staff of the different organizations describe, explain, and in other ways talk about collaboration obstacles and successes encountered when cooperating with neighbouring organizations. In addition, we analyse the discursive and interactive patterns that are part of the construction of such phenomena. The research questions are: (1) How do members of the staff describe successful cooperation between the actors involved in Project Turnstone? (2) How do the participants describe collaboration obstacles regarding cooperation with the participating police and border organizations? The analytical results of this study are presented in two chapters: (1) Successful collaboration in intelligence and operative work, and (2) Collaboration obstacles in intelligence and operative work.

### Fieldwork

Early ethnographers sought to find pieces of social systems, thereby discovering how they fit together in the societies they studied. Detailed accounts of social life are still one of the foundations of sociological research, and ethnography can be described as careful long-term observation of a group of people to disclose patterns in local social life (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999, p. 561).

Some field observations in this study were obtained through so called go-alongs. According to Kusenbach (2003), this method produces in-depth knowledge because the researchers follow the daily lives of the people they are studying. Memories, experiences, and viewpoints, which are

not always discussed in interviews, can be easier to grasp when the researcher observes day-to-day activities, meetings, and situations affecting the person who being studied (Kusenbach, 2003). By combining fieldwork with interviews, the researcher can acquire a nuanced picture of the investigated person or phenomenon (Basic, 2012, 2015).

The participating border authorities provided the researchers with access to their organizations for short-term visits, observations, and interviews. Because of confidentiality issues, the researchers were not given full access to all project-related meetings, activities, or actions. Therefore, this report is an account of actions and conversations that were witnessed or heard by the researchers and, as such, is a product of the information made available to the researchers by people facilitating or controlling access to the place being studied. The goal of this report is not to evaluate or assess the productivity or working efforts of the police, border, or coast guard officers interviewed, or to disclose the specific working methods of the police or border organizations, which may compromise on-going police or border-related investigations. Instead, we try to understand successes and difficulties as retold by interviewees or conveyed during field observations.

Because the fieldwork observations were obtained in five countries and seven different police or border authorities, the method can be defined as “multi-cited” fieldwork<sup>2</sup> or as “doing fieldwork in more than one place” (Hage, 2005). The method of the research is organized around the timeframe and duration of Project Turnstone. The data for the present study was gathered during 718 hours of field observations in the participating border authorities. The researchers gathered

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<sup>2</sup> Field observations were obtained from January 2014 to June 2015.

data during work sessions, everyday border guard or police work, project-related meetings, day-to-day office work, official organizational meetings, official project-related meetings, joint actions such as operative action weeks, and during interviews.

### *Fieldnotes*

Writing fieldnotes is an important part of performing fieldwork characterized by making choices about what is described and eventually analysed. The researchers rely on fieldnotes about specific events and situations that they observed during fieldwork. These notes were written during interviews and formal meetings within the framework of this project, but also during informal meetings, before and after interviews, while travelling, and during visits to the different border agencies. The information gathered for this report was anonymized and the names of people, places, and other means of identification have been removed or altered. The researchers have described various scenes, settings, objects, actions, and people that can aid in portraying a social world or its people. Doing fieldwork and describing dialogue is more complicated when the local language differs from the researchers' own (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Conversations and interviews with informants were conducted in English or Swedish for practical reasons and the fact that the border officers participating in the project represent a minimum of five different languages. The work language spoken by the officers during joint meetings or actions was mainly English, but also Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian.

### *Interviews*

An interview is an instrument used to provide the researcher with narratives, descriptions, and texts connected to

the researcher's interest (Kvale, 2006, p. 484). Interviews were important for this study and aided the researchers in obtaining the perception and experiences of project participants. Being in the field with the people being studied gave the researchers a chance to look closely at what the participants say and do and how they create local meaning (Emery, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 134). Variability and inconsistency in conversations or interviews is not seen as a prospective foundation of error. Throughout an interview, the same person can express contrasting or contradictory opinions. Regularity cannot usually be pinned at the level of the individual speaker, but the researchers can still make sense of participants' views (Talja, 1999, pp. 461-464). The purpose of the interviews conducted for this study was to give people space to voice opinions in their own words, discuss themes that they find important, and analyse their own experiences. The interviews can be described as "semi-structured". In semi-structured interviews the researcher has a prepared list of questions or interesting topics that he/she wants to discuss with the interviewee. The aim of semi-structured interviews is for the conversation to resemble a conversation rather than a typical interview per se. A dictation microphone was used during most of the interviews. An interview guide was designed in which different topics that the interviewer wanted to address during the interview were noted. The guide's contents were usually reviewed prior to each interview, and the interviewer attempted to address all of the topics of interest during the conversation. For the present study, 73 interviews were conducted with 66 members of the different border authorities, including border officers, coast guard officers, police officers, and border police officers. Additional administrative staff connected

to Project Turnstone was also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Swedish or English<sup>3</sup>. On some occasions, an interpreter was used when the interviewee did not speak English. The interviewed officers are of different ranks and have different work tasks on different levels, performing hands-on border guarding, administrative, operative, or intelligence-based work. Follow-up interviews were conducted with five members of the original interview group. In general, interviews were conducted individually, but a few were completed in a group setting. The interviewees and participants in the fieldwork process were informed about the purpose of the study, anonymity, and that participation is voluntary. Names of people and places involved in the research, as well as other information that could identify the interviewees, have been changed for the present study and other presentations related to this study. The researchers emphasized that the interest of the study was general experiences and social phenomenon and that there is no intention to document personal data.

### **Successful Collaboration in Intelligence and Operative Work**

The focus of this chapter is on how the participants described and analysed successful cooperation, and how the interviewees regarded cooperation between participating organizations. In order to answer these questions, we looked for similarities or contradictions in the informants' descriptions. The concepts of successful cooperation versus unsuccessful cooperation, trust, and mutual interests are especially relevant to the specific descriptions of operative work cooperation that we analysed. Participating officers listed official agreements, mutual interest,

and motivation from the organizations involved as generating successful cooperation. Organizations do not exist independent of their members, who construct the organization through their speech, writing, and actions (Czarniawska, 1997). Inter-organizational identities are reconstructed and constructed in practices, such as joint efforts, conflict, and everyday routines. Talking, socializing, and working with colleagues from other organizationsaid in the creation of a shared collaborative identity. Officers describe network building as a process involving several steps. First, official agreements must be made regarding cooperation between the organizations. Second, the officers must meet and get to know one another, learn about the others'abilitiesand limitations, and ascertain ways of communicating. During the joint operative action weeks, there is an emphasis on working and talking“on equal terms”. Participants interviewed during the second year of Project Turnstone were happy with the progress and experienced a stronger connection and more efficient cooperation with participating partners. Most interviewees sawofficial meetings as less beneficial for establishing strong social collaborative bonds, even though most agreed that it is often necessary and valuable to establish official collaboration details at an organizational level. Official agreements are necessary to initiate cooperation, but the time aspect of processing intelligence information demands personal contacts and interpersonal collaborative networks. The interviewees seemed to be aware of the purpose of the weeks and expressed motivation to participate. All participantswere eager to perform well and had common goals: to find and apprehend targets and establish new contacts to improve their contact networks.

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<sup>3</sup> Some citations included in this report have been translated from Swedish into English by the authors.

### *Personal Contacts, Joint Actions, and Collocation*

When talking to participants in Project Turnstone, all agreed that personal relationships are important for successful collaboration. The researchers were told by various interviewees that one of the most beneficial aspects of Project Turnstone is that it facilitates interactions and joint operative actions for the border, police, and coast guard officers. Getting to know the people you work with in real situations facilitates future day-to-day connections and enables successful cooperation. Such opinions may not seem surprising, but are nevertheless important. However, the question is: how do the participants define successful cooperation? When asking border officers what constitutes successful cooperation, most agreed that cooperation is successful when there is no or little delay in the information exchange between cooperating organizations and when the suspects are discovered. Fast communication exchange is possible when officers know the right point of contact -who has the ability to "act" in the collaborating organization. One aspect also points to the importance of transferring information quickly via email or phone. One officer explained: "The official channels (such as the Europol channel SIENA) are useful for receiving and sending information to a certain extent. However, official channels are usually not fast enough when a suspect is arriving on a ferry. When the information has reached the other organization, it is often too late and the suspect has disappeared." As one border guard stated: "The main expectation [of the project] is of course that the information, *exchange* of information, would be more direct, and that you don't have any *timelines*. Often we need the information *now*, we have arrested this person, we can't hold him for days, only for hours, and we need this information now."

Official channels such as those provided

by Europol or Interpol are used, but personal contacts are claimed to be more reliable when information must be received quickly. Officers describe the organized criminal groups as being highly mobile without concern for national borders. The Schengen enlargement facilitates the movement of criminal groups because passport controls and systematic internal controls are abolished. Yet, police officers and border guards need to perform their job duties of protecting the EU and Schengen countries from criminal activity or irregular migration. Suspected criminals can find various routes around the Baltic Sea area, passing through several countries during the journey. An important part of criminal intelligence work is to map and analyse the *modus operandi* (Bennell & Canter, 2002), the behaviour pattern of criminal groups. These patterns provide intelligence information regarding the movement and actions of individuals.

The police, border, and coast guard organizations participating in Project Turnstone are not unaccustomed to international cooperation including personnel exchange or joint investigations, but they were unaccustomed to the design of the operative action weeks. However, what is unique about the Turnstone model of working is the implementation of the operative action weeks in which officers have the chance to exchange, share, and cooperate with immediate action in the same office using their own information resources. During the joint operative action weeks, select members from the participating organizations gathered at the different organizations and worked together for a couple of days to a week. Those weeks made it possible for officers to sit in the same room and work side by side with colleagues they usually cooperate with via phone, email, or official channels such as the Europol information system. According to the officers, these weeks were important

for increasing social relationships, thereby strengthening the collaboration.

Some of the organizations participating in Project Turnstone have long histories of cooperation because of geographic or social proximity and have an understanding of each other's organizational identities. Previous cooperation was established mainly when partners have common ferry lines, such as between Tallinn and Helsinki, Stockholm and Helsinki, Riga and Tallinn or Klaipeda in Lithuania and Karlshamn in Sweden. The ferry routes demand cooperation from border organizations because a large number of passengers travel between these transport hubs on a daily basis. Several participants also had experience from a previous project, the Triangle project. The Triangle project<sup>4</sup> included Stockholm, Tallinn, Helsinki, Åbo, and Mariehamn and later inspired the design of Project Turnstone. Some organizations participating in the project have less history of joint operative cooperation and a greater need for social interactions to negotiate organizational identities. Few ferry lines existed between Klaipeda and the other participating countries; therefore, several project initiators and officers were eager to increase cooperation with this contact point. However, as organized criminal groups are no longer restricted to these transport hubs, officers stated that the close cooperation network must be extended further to partners who do not have common ferry lines.

Despite geographical, cultural, or historical proximity, several officers asserted that it is difficult to initiate cooperation without a network-building process in which interpersonal relationships can be

established. Intelligence officers from the police, border, and coast guard organizations asserted that personal contacts are vital for successful cooperation and law enforcement, and that personal contacts are created through social meetings and working with colleagues from other countries or organizations. Meeting partners face to face and establishing a personal working relationship also increases knowledge of the working methods and procedures of collaboration partners. Such knowledge is important to avoid misunderstandings and confusion as to how various legal and work procedures are handled. During the operative action weeks, each participating officer has his or her experience, contacts, and information systems available to facilitate quick and easy cooperation with other officers. Participants also increase their knowledge of who has access to different systems, what level of authority different officers or organizations have, and which working methods are applied by different organizations. Officers share experiences and can learn how to better use different systems to find important information.

In personal meetings, partners create work relationships and friendships but also establish work identities suitable to that situation. Several officers mentioned that the first step of successful cooperation is to identify the "right" persons to contact - who can act in certain situations, those who have the power to find information; and who can do or order surveillance. Contact persons are also considered "right" if they are dedicated to doing their jobs well and show interest in doing their best in sending, receiving, or handling information.

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<sup>4</sup> The aim of the Triangle project was to increase collaboration between border control authorities and included the exchange of officials, joint operations, and exchange of methodology and information. The Triangle project was terminated in 2009 and resulted in a number of arrests and charges for human smuggling, abuse of original personal documents, and fraudulent use of documents. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emnstudies/irregularmigration/se\\_20120120\\_irregular\\_migration\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emnstudies/irregularmigration/se_20120120_irregular_migration_final_en.pdf).



The operative action weeks can be regarded as forums where intelligence officers and analysts can meet and establish their own cooperation network by establishing certain work-related expressions (e.g., labelling what was officially named operative action weeks as *power weeks*), standard forms for writing information about suspects, and learning from each others' experiences. This process can be seen as a way for collaboration partners to refer to themselves as a collective rather than separate entities representing their individual organizations. Researchers (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005; Lotia & Hardy 2008, p. 379; Basic, 2015) previously established that the design of inter-organizational collaborative identities appears to be the basis for successful collaboration. During the operative actions weeks implemented by Project Turnstone, officers expressed a strong motivation to perform their job duties. Working together with other officers and achieving successful results increased their sense of purpose and the importance of the job. Several participating intelligence officers and criminal analysts also expressed a wish to continue working sidebyside with colleagues from other organizations in the future and, as mentioned earlier, expressed fear that the Turnstone operative working model will terminate at the end of the project.

#### *Agreements, Meetings, and Results*

In conversations with interviewees, it was clear that successful cooperation was considered in connection with collaborating with partners to achieve operative results. The paramount aim of Project Turnstone is to fight cross-border crime in the Baltic Sea area, achieve operative results, and gain a better understanding of the patterns and working methods of criminal groups. According to interviewees, these aims are achieved only if involved police and border organizations

cooperate. As one border guard described: "When personal networks are created, people are willing to send information that is useful for law enforcement."

According to participating officers, one of the benefits of Project Turnstone is the operative hands-on approach. Previous cooperation projects taught officers that official and formal meetings and agreements are necessary for cooperation but do not automatically generate efficient, bilateral, interpersonal cooperation. Official agreements must be made before interpersonal cooperation can be achieved, and meetings are important for informing participants of what should be done and how the cooperation should proceed. The project initiators were keen to point out that participating officers should be given the opportunity to cooperate on their own terms during the operative action weeks. Based on the pre-conditions of each officer, the best practice of working was to be established by the officers themselves. Participating intelligence officers saw the operative action weeks (i.e., *power weeks*) as more valuable for cooperation than official meetings or agreements, as working hands-on provided operative working results. One coast guard member stated that "during previous cooperation there has not been enough focus on operative results, there has been too many meetings, too much talk." Other officers agreed that previous joint investigations were successful when officers had a specific case to work on. Documentation and high-level agreements are important to achieve operative results but, according to several border officers, there is also a risk that information is "forgotten" or "not processed".

Thus, the second core objective of the operative action weeks is to process "forgotten" intelligence information. Each participating country has law enforcement models to combine and ensure the processes of management, control, intelligence,

and enforcement, but there is a risk that intelligence information that does not fit the models is left unprocessed. The purpose of the operative action weeks is to “catch” this intelligence information with the hope of discovering patterns and new *modus operandi* for suspected criminals. “Every person working with this has a piece of information,” one interviewee stated. “The officers in Klaipeda might know a lot about *this*, and someone in Riga might know a lot about *that*, there might be facts *here*, but it can’t be processed because it doesn’t *fit*. If we combine all of these pieces of information we might start to see proper *patterns* that can tell us something important.” Another officer similarly indicated that:

“The questions and investigations cannot be solved in one country. If you have information from Estonia you only have a small piece of the puzzle, but by cooperation you will get this larger picture and then you can decide in what country you will prosecute these people and collect the evidence from different countries, especially when we are talking about mobile and international criminal groups and the organizing of illegal immigration, have to have this cooperation, otherwise it’s impossible to do it.”

The process discussed by interviewees takes time and is facilitated when intelligence officers can collocate and work together on a day-to-day basis. However, documentation is important for these operative findings to be useful for more precise and detailed analysis. Each operative action week accumulates lists of targets, providing a number of suspected criminals and their travelling routes. Border officers in particular highlighted the benefit of Project Turnstone in shedding light on the value of internal checks in fighting cross-border crime. These interviewees also hoped that these lists would help officers be proactive

and to better understand the patterns and future methods of suspected targets.

The aspiration for the future is the establishment of a proper system of information exchange leading directly to operative actions and that works with all participating countries. According to participating officers, the personal contacts established during the operative action weeks are invaluable and seem to be superior to any information system. According to a border intelligence officer, “What is important is not what can be measured in results, the number of arrests, or the amount of goods confiscated, the contacts you get give you more than any results that you can measure.”

#### *Sharing Motivation, Vision, and Trust*

As previously argued, in order to create a shared collaborative identity participants must meet and share conversations to construct and reconstruct the social phenomenon of collaboration. Sharing conversations entails speaking the same language (literally and figuratively), as well as understanding each other’s working methods, aims, goals, and motivations. Lotia and Hardy (2008, pp. 366-389) suggest that a common vision is important for producing and reproducing joint collaborative identities. The officers experienced the project participants endeavouring for the same goals and understood the work practices of operative work. This, according to several officers, is necessary if cooperation is to run smoothly. In interviews, a majority of border, police, and coast guard officers expressed feelings of solidarity, emphasizing that they “speak the same language”, even though they come from different countries. Officers ascertain that “cross-border criminality is not a Latvian problem, a Finnish problem, or a Swedish problem, but a *European* problem”, and this is the approach needed to achieve successful bilateral cooperation. “We have

to understand that this is no longer only *our* work, for our organization, it's not only a question of national security, it's definitely a joint effort," one border police officer claimed. Others have highlighted the help from neighbouring countries and organizations to perform their work duties at home: "If I don't get information from other partners, I am practically blind; we are depending on other countries."

Previous experiences with joint collaboration, behaviour, and competence shape the participants' views of collaboration partners. Project Turnstone and the operative action weeks have facilitated interactions between border, police, and coast guard officers starting to build bilateral cooperation networks. An individual's motivation and interest in cooperating, as noted earlier, is crucial when creating a trust-based relationship. A vast majority of the interviewees regarded trust as an important element for cooperating between organizations. The importance of trust is acknowledged and widely talked about in organizational studies, but researchers are vague about what trust actually means in an organizational context (Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975, p. 497; McAllister, 1995). Trust is seen as a basic collaboration mechanism in everyday social life (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2008), the creation of organizational networks, and identity formation. Similarities between individuals, such as ethnic background, age, gender, and social status, can influence trust development in groups (Brewer, 1979; Turner, 1987). In the present study, most participants expressed feelings of sharing similar cultural, historical, and ethnic backgrounds as they were part of the Baltic Sea area, the EU, and the Schengen enlargement. Although differences in terms of organizational structure and cultural background were mentioned, they were considered to have little negative impact on cooperation

practices. According to an interviewee, "It's the Schengen border, and we have quite similar adaptation and attitudes towards respecting the legal background and legal framework, and within that sense there is not much misunderstanding concerning cultural or differences in background." The participating border officers often used terms such as friends, neighbours, colleagues, brothers or sisters when describing collaboration partners. Such descriptions imply that the officers have positive associations with their partners and regard cooperation as productive.

The officers highlighted trust as being vital in most cooperation situations, and close networks of exchange cannot be established without trust. "When it comes to international cooperation," one officer said, "in my opinion I prefer giving information face to face, I want to know the person I am calling." A majority of interviewees agreed that trust is vital when it comes to sharing or sending sensitive intelligence information. Another officer stated that:

"It is important to meet face to face, if you only e-mail you don't know who the person is, and you don't know if you want to send information. But if you have met it is easier. Trust is important. When it comes to exchange of information, you want to know who you are calling. After some jokes, a drink, or a conversation it is easier to know the person."

Although officers describe the Europol and Schengen channels as efficient, a "personal encounter" is needed at some point. Most participants see the operative action weeks as opportunities to meet colleagues and establish trust with people with whom they had not previously cooperated. However, working together is not the only important element in creating social organizational bonds. After-work socializing, such as eating dinner together, during these events also

has a strong impact on the participants' work relationships. Facilitating dinners and joint activities when hosts and visiting officers can meet should not be regarded as less beneficial for establishing strong cooperation networks. According to interviewees, this is a good way to get to know your partner, establishing trust and cooperative relationships. Doing activities together that everyone can perform, such as sharing meals, joking together, and socializing in a relaxed setting, can decrease boundaries between participating professions and organizations (Hjortsjö, 2006, pp. 189-196).

Comparing one of the first operative action weeks (June 2014) to a more recent operative action week (May 2015) made it clear that the participating officers have established close interpersonal working relations. Participating officers were more confident regarding working methods and had better knowledge of who had access to different types of information. Trust had been established between the officers and, despite minor technical problems, there was no question as to how the work should be performed. During the first operative action weeks, several participating officers claimed that they did not know what to expect because they had not previously participated in a similar work situation.

Gaining trust was explained as a process that began with a cooperation agreement and exchange of officers or a joint investigation. Interviewed police and border officers associated trustworthy colleagues with transparency and honesty. Officers also mentioned competence and responsibility, which is highlighted in previous research (Barber, 1983; Shapiro, 1990).

Doing your best within your limitations and having the motivation to do it well was also explained as the best way of being seen as a trustworthy colleague: "When you have trust on the other side people are willing to work, it's like a moving stone afterwards."

Therefore, we can list a few assumptions of how trust improves cooperation practices in the participating border organizations. First, trust relationships developed in collaborations are important for sustaining and defining individual and organizational effectiveness (Shapiro, 1990; Zucker, 1986; McAllister, 1995). Second, mutual confidence or trust influences control at the institutional and personal levels of organizations and enable sustained effective action in times of uncertainty or organizational change requiring mutual adjustments (Shapiro, 1990; Zucker, 1986; Granovetter, 1985; Pennings & Woiceshyn, 1987; McAllister, 1995; Thompson, 1967). Third, partners experiencing mutual trust are more willing to take risks because there is a belief that others will not take advantage of you. Therefore, an individual creates an expectation that they will find what is expected rather than what is feared (Deutsch, 1973).

In contrast, Cook, Russell, and Levi (2005, pp. 1-2) argues that "trust is important in many interpersonal contexts, but it cannot carry the weight of making complex societies function productively and effectively." In their view, regulation is more important than trust, and trust works primarily at the interpersonal level to produce micro level social order, lowering the costs for monitoring that might be required if individuals did not trust each other. To a certain extent, interviewed officers regard trust as being vital for successful cooperation. However, the interviewees did maintain that trust has to be earned, and having trust in one colleague does not automatically mean having trust in his or her organization. Also, trust can be damaged quickly, as explained by one officer: "Just one mistake is enough, one small lie, or the wrong information and the trust is broken. If you don't know the answer to a question, it's better to be honest about it." When trust

is destroyed it takes time to re-establish it. The officers participating in Project Turnstone maintain that they have trust in one another and that it has increased even more after the Turnstone cooperation activities. However, Cook, Russell, and Levi (2005, p.3) points out that even though trust relationships enable one type of cooperation, it might inhibit others. Trust relationships within a group might create boundaries that prevent cooperation with those outside the group, and the risk is that helpful parties will be excluded from the group. Nevertheless, as interviewees in this study pointed out, the importance of mutual trust between individuals working in professions engaged in policing borders, which implies partly secretive intelligence work involving large organizations from different countries, is why social interaction, joint working efforts, and common actions as those implemented by Project Turnstone are important.

### **Collaboration Obstacles in Intelligence and Operative Work**

The fundamental issue of EU and Schengen law enforcement is that it is carried out by different organizations with different areas of focus, legislation, mandates, and working methods. Thus, cooperation between different organizations is prone to misunderstandings or complications. The key to solving this issue is claimed to be knowledge and close interaction with collaboration partners. Creating inter-organizational collaboration identities is a dynamic process, and conflicts or problems are not rare (Basic, 2012). The pursuit of collaboration and changes within stations can cause conflicts regarding professional matters (Kolb & Putnam, 1992, pp. 16-17). Collaboration and conflict go hand in hand, and it is not uncommon that struggles arise in intermediate organizational relationships with actors wanting to control or resist

the activities of others (Huxham & Beech, 2008, pp. 555-579; Schruijer, 2008, p. 432). The source of disagreements is often conflict regarding organizational goals, interests, and identities (Schruijer, 2008).

In this chapter we analyse how the participating officers described collaboration difficulties and the obstacles they encountered during the operative action weeks arranged by Project Turnstone, as well as during day-to-day cooperation between the border organizations. We adopt a similar approach as in the previous chapter analysing opinions and statements from interviewees and observations made during fieldwork and go-alongs. Officers listed significant obstacles, such as language barriers, differences in legislation, unclear structures, and rare opportunities for colocation, as affecting their work practices. According to participants, the most fundamental issues are how the Turnstone cooperation model should be used in the future, how collected intelligence information should be properly analysed, and how cooperation networks should be maintained.

#### *Language Difficulties*

In the previous chapter we focused on the importance of participating members meeting and sharing conversations, experiences, and mutual interests to facilitate successful cooperation. Although a majority of the officers interviewed experience a joint “understanding” of each other’s goals, working methods, and operative aims, language barriers between the officers are still a vital issue. The common language spoken during the operative action weeks and other joint activities as part of Project Turnstone is English, but officers often fell into the pattern of speaking more with people with whom they share their native language. This observation is not surprising considering Turner (1987) and Brewer’s (1979) claim that groups of individuals

with similar fundamental characteristics, such as ethnic background or a common language, have an advantage in creating trusting working relationships. However, cultural background and ethnic identity were not seen as obstacles as long as officers are able to communicate and speak the same language. The interviewees viewed language barriers as occasional obstacles because it might take longer to explain something to a colleague with whom you cannot easily communicate. “The main barrier is language,” explained a border officer during one of the first operative action weeks when asked about the main obstacles he had observed. “You can’t express yourself clearly because sometimes you know what you mean but there are some misunderstandings; sometimes there is a lack of feedback or no response. Maybe it has to do with language limitations.” Officers often encountered language difficulties in their day-to-day work when they needed to contact partners in other European countries, generally if the officers have limited knowledge of English or cannot understand each other’s first languages. Some officers stated that misunderstandings can occur, even between people from the same country who speak the same language, because specific expressions used in daily work can differ in the different stations. For example, border officers from different Baltic Sea nations might understand each other better and have more in common than they do with other national police organizations. Interviewees highlighted that officers doing the same work tasks (e.g., border guarding or criminal analysis) can often understand each other and each other’s work practices, as they are fairly similar. Belonging to the EU and Schengen enlargement also provides the officers with a common (English language) terminology that

can be used when communicating with national partners.

Language difficulties can obstruct daily contact and be obstacles for officers who want to keep in contact with collaboration partners. Keeping communication channels up to date is a full-time job but well worth the effort according to interviewees. However, for such efforts to be useful there must be an interest from all collaboration partners to participate. However, the operative action weeks during which the officers were able to work side by side have simplified communication because officers know who to contact and who they can talk to in case they are in need of quick information. They have also been able to work out ways of communicating, such as which terminology should be used and how information should be written. Minor issues, such as how to write the date of birth and surname or last name, had to be worked out during the first operative action weeks. Language barriers are still obstacles in many situations, decreasing the sense of cooperative group identity and making work progress slower and less efficiently. During one of the operative action weeks, the researchers observed a situation in the Turnstone office when the different officers spoke with their colleagues in Swedish, Lithuanian, Finnish, Estonian, and Russian at the same time. The officers in the room could not understand each other (apart from the person with whom they were speaking) or understand the information about certain cases that were discussed.

An issue mentioned during several interviews that may be the outcome of language difficulties is the lack of feedback. One example is found in the final report about the Turnstone Operational Week in Klaipėda 2015<sup>5</sup>. The report states that the number of actions carried out against found hits is unknown because that information

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<sup>5</sup> Document submitted to participating officers and organizations by the project coordinators.

was not provided by all participating organizations. Lack of feedback regarding information that is sent or cases being worked on is a source of frustration for collaborating partners. Feedback can also be an important source of information regarding successful or less successful working methods and procedures and can help officers improve their work skills and increase the sense of cooperation between the involved parties. One interviewee noted the risk of partners losing interest in communicating and sending information if they never receive any feedback about how the information had been used or processed. One operative action week participant stated: “Feedback is just as important as getting information, analysing the information, and sending it to relevant partners. If you don’t know what happens to the information, there is no point in sending it, is there?” The lack of feedback may depend on language problems but also national legislation, confidentiality rules, or staff shortage. This is another example of knowledge regarding collaboration partners and their working methods being vital to successful communication regarding cooperation.

#### *Different Organizations, Different Legislation*

Hjortsjö (2006, pp. 189-196) states that the borders between those involved in collaborative efforts must be erased in order to achieve successful cooperation. External borders between the countries involved in Project Turnstone were already “erased” with the Schengen implementation and EU enlargement. The organizations involved share the common goal of fighting criminal activity in the Baltic Sea area. Interviewees expressed the importance of being “as flexible as the criminals” operating in the Baltic Sea area, meaning that international organized crime groups are not restricted by national borders. Therefore, law enforcement agencies must do the same and cooperate

despite organizational backgrounds or initial organizational focus. Current problems in the Euroregion regarding the legal, political, and economic spheres have been well analysed by various researchers. In particular, the absence of a common legal form in EU countries and differences in the internal coordination of Euroregion activities are obstacles to cooperation (Dastanka & Chyprys, 2014). Considering the different organizational backgrounds and legislation of the seven police, coast guard, and border organizations involved in Project Turnstone, issues regarding common interests and mutual goals are not straightforward.

An issue briefly mentioned as an obstacle to cooperation is the risk of different organizations placing more emphasis on solving certain types of criminal activity. The crimes focused on by Project Turnstone are all border related, ranging from trafficking and pickpocketing by organized crime groups to boat thefts and home burglaries. As participating organizations are police, border, and coast guard authorities, it is unavoidable that each organization has its own area of interest. A few officers highlighted that organizations in “countries of transition” (i.e., countries in the Schengen area not bordered by a non-EU country) are not considering cases of human smuggling as severely as organizations working to protect external borders. Similarly, coast guard officers might focus on cases concerning environmental protection, search and rescue, and border surveillance, whereas police officers might emphasize theft or burglaries.

Schruijer’s (2008, p. 432) research on collaboration suggests that the source of conflict between organizations is usually a contradiction between organizational interests, goals, and identities. As officers claim to share the same goals and collaborative identity, the issue of having different interests could be a source of conflict. A few participants mentioned that

this issue might affect priorities in certain situations, but this was not clearly observed by the researchers during fieldwork.

Additional obstacles highlighted in interviews are issues of confidentiality, differences in legalization, and restrictions regarding access to information or providing information to collaboration partners. Participating officers mentioned legislation differences in regards to obtaining suspects or confiscating stolen goods, and differences between police and border organizations regarding undercover surveillance or following suspected targets. Although belonging to the EU and Schengen area, participating organizations follow different national legislation and work practices. In certain cases, physical, legal, and bureaucratic distance between collaborating partners makes collaboration difficult. Police, border, and coast guard officers are well connected through information exchange networks, but standardized rules and regulations occasionally slow the information exchange process. For example, the involved countries have different laws regarding the time limit and procedures for keeping suspects in custody and handling evidence. Another example is the issue of providing information, as some organizations have firmer regulations when it comes to sending or sharing information. This process, which can be slow and rigid, is the cause of frustration and missed opportunities to arrest suspects and solve crimes. The complexity of national internal issues, such as the rights of organizations to access or provide certain information, was mentioned early on during Project Turnstone.

The main difference between police and border organizations highlighted in interviews is the police's ability to perform undercover surveillance, which is not possible for border guard organizations (such as the Latvian and Lithuanian border guard services). Similarly, the SIENA system is mostly accessed by police

organizations, though this is not seen as a problem during operative action weeks because officers with access can assist colleagues in this matter. The Swedish border guard and Estonian border guard are part of a police organization but have separately organized border divisions. A great source of frustration is irregular working hours, as intelligence work is not a 9 to 5 undertaking. Difficulties with getting in contact with, for example, the Swedish border police after regular office hours might delay information about the travel of suspected targets.

The matters mentioned are not great obstacles according to project participants, but are sources of frustration if they obstruct work processes, aggravate the communication flow, and create confusion regarding the right point of contact. Joint actions, such as the operative action weeks, and personal contacts make these difficulties easier to overcome. According to a border police officer: "My knowledge improves day by day but I always find surprises that something is impossible since counterpart organizations are structured in different ways, but I think when we talk about Helsinki, Stockholm, Riga, and Klaipeda I think the picture is quite clear, but it's different if you ask if I know about Poland." Not surprisingly, intelligence officers and participating staff members with current or previous experience with cross-border cooperation had knowledge about the working methods of their closest partners. Nevertheless, several officers explained that the information they had was limited concerning certain areas, such as the national legislation of their collaboration partners. Even officers with years of experience with cross-border cooperation expressed confusion regarding some judicial work practices or the surveillance restrictions of collaboration partners, stating that knowledge diminishes frustration. Interviews also revealed that



many staff members working with everyday border guarding or police work still have limited knowledge of international partners' work practices. Although this may not have a direct negative impact on their work efforts, several interviewees claimed that knowledge of the working methods of other organizations would be an advantage.

#### *Collocation and Future Cooperation*

Continued cooperation demands the same level of commitment as shown during the joint operative action weeks. As organizational researchers (Hibbert, Huxham & Smith Ring, 2008, pp. 400-402; Lindberg, 2009, pp. 55-59, 64) have acknowledged, clear organizational goals and roles facilitate cooperation and clarify the main organizational objectives. Although officers have not mentioned this in interviews, some confusion regarding roles, structure, and responsibilities were observed during the first operative action weeks. As the project developed, participating officers found their place and understood the structures and objectives, but there may still be confusion regarding specific work tasks, as discussed regarding the example of sending feedback. For future cooperation, clarifying responsibilities among participants may improve the networking process among members of the organization. Although one objective of the project was to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and too many formal meetings, adding structure to work tasks, responsibilities, and work roles for the participant can aid in clarifying working methods and the purpose of the cooperation activities, avoiding confusion (Dacin, Reid & Ring Smith, 2008).

The hands-on approach adopted by Project Turnstone has been well received by project participants and partners. However, some officers requested more pre-information in order to better organize the personnel or staff needed for certain

actions and had hoped to be asked in advance to participate. In the beginning of the project, several participants were confused about the objectives and operative actions. Before the first operative action week, one interviewee stated that he would like to have "more pre-information", arguing that "if it's an operation where we need resources, we need time. It is also a legal background; we have to do our work schedules in a certain time period. I believe that everything can be planned in advance, for example concerning next [operative action] week." As the project advanced, more people were familiar with the structure of the project and how actions were to be carried out.

The advantage of the operative action weeks and joint activities implemented during Project Turnstone is that participants have been able to meet in person, sharing intelligence information and knowledge regarding working methods. Although complete coherence regarding methods and regulation cannot be obtained between the collaborating partners in the Baltic Sea area, systematic joint activities, work actions, and education are beneficial for increasing successful cooperation. Officers have mentioned that the Schengen agreement demands that border organizations adapt to working as closely with international partners as they have been with national partners.

Organizational scholars (Emery & Trist, 1965, p. 7) have acknowledged environmental changes facing modern organizations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In their view, the main challenge of organizational studies is that the environmental contexts of the organizations are more complex now due to technological changes and development. Similarly, the border officers and organizations participating in Project Turnstone must cooperate and adapt to belonging to the Schengen implementation. Interviewees were well aware of the need to adapt to

new methods of working and emphasized the need for close bilateral cooperation. The contacts, mutual trust, and understanding established during the operative action weeks will continue, according to the officers, as long as the same people continue to cooperate. "The problem is," according to one officer, "that sometimes there are different people attending joint actions all the time, and there is no time to create a working relationship with this person since you might not ever meet this person face-to-face again." To be able to keep personal contact, cooperation and interaction must be maintained. "Sometimes a quick phone call, saying hello and asking how things are going is enough," a coast guard officer declared.

One of the fears expressed regarding Project Turnstone is that cooperative activity and operative actions will end, and that gathered intelligence information will be left unprocessed after the project's termination. According to one officer it is important to:

"Focus on what happens when you get hits from traffic, the actual measures you are doing to deal with it, not only information exchange but what are you doing with the suspect, are you going to check him, are you going to take him under surveillance? Is there enough criminal activity background that you can arrest him and start an investigation and there had been, there had not been this kind of planning? So it's unclear what we are going to do? And that could be very important for us."

A significant question is also how the operative action weeks should proceed when officers no longer have the possibility of colocation. Colocation was one of the advantages of Project Turnstone associated with creating personal bilateral cooperation networks. Officers maintained that the contacts that had been created were strong, but in order to invite new people into the networks the same process of integration and trust building needs to

occur. Thus, the Turnstone model is not a quick and static implementation, but a continued, organic process that must be sustained in order for close cooperation to exist. In the beginning of the project weekly phone meetings or non-formal phone conferences between the collaboration partners were suggested. The phone meetings only occurred a few times because there were not enough time and language barriers stood in the way. An intelligence officer said that it is more efficient and useful to contact each other when there is a specific case or when information is needed, instead of at random.

To maintain cooperation networks, it is vital for collaboration partners to stay in contact. There have also been suggestions that teams should be able to cooperate in joint activities virtually, as physical colocation will not always be possible. Interviewees also view processing and analysing the large amount of intelligence information that has been gathered as a priority. Naturally, these suggestions depend on the available financial and staff resources and are long-term objectives. In order for cooperation to be as efficient as possible, participants also suggested inviting more collaboration partners. No customs organizations were involved in the present project, and this might further enhance the outcomes of investigations. According to one interviewee: "Every time we are together in those intelligence meetings we present the intelligence picture well, but it's just one piece of the big picture because there is always something missing, such as customs." New partners have already been invited into the project, with Poland, Norway, and Denmark participating as extended partners starting in late 2014. The project team is highly aware of the need for further cooperation and is planning a follow-up cooperation project. If grants are received for the project, the team is hoping that

it will be a way to remove the obstacles encountered in Project Turnstone and create more opportunities for joint actions and colocation.

## Conclusion

Ethnography is nothing until inscribed as text (Fine, 1993, p. 288), and the task of the researcher is to turn ethnographic fieldnotes and observations into writings that speak to a wider audience (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 172). The purpose of this report is not to provide clear-cut guidelines for successful cooperation, but to provide a sociological perspective regarding the collaboration activities implemented by Project Turnstone. Our focus was to describe how participating police, border, and coast guard officers have contributed to Project Turnstone and to analyse examples of successful cooperation and collaboration difficulties. Based on ethnographically gathered material, including field observations, go-alongs, interviews, and document analysis, we described how the participating police, border, and coast guard officers understand successful cooperation, as well as the collaboration difficulties they identified.

Inter-organizational cooperation identities are reconstructed and constructed through joint effort, conflict, and everyday routines. Previous research on cooperation asserts that social interactions create a greater sense of trust and motivation, resulting in organizational efficiency. Trust among collaborating partners increases participants' risk taking because they know what to expect from their partners and how cooperating organizations work (Deutsch, 1973). Most participants view the operative actions weeks as opportunities to meet colleagues and establish trust. Although not officially speaking the same national language, officers experienced a common sense of

purpose, objective, and aim, which they expressed as "speaking the same language".

Cross-border criminality is regarded as a European problem and a joint effort, but a shared collaborative identity can only be achieved if partners meet, converse, conduct joint efforts, and work side by side with hands-on work tasks. Although official meetings and organizational agreements of cooperation are vital to collaboration, such practices are not the key to successful cooperation and successful law enforcement. Partners need to understand each other (literally and figuratively), as well as each other's working methods, aims, goals, and motivations. Officers exchanging intelligence information expressed that they had sufficient knowledge of close cooperation partners. However, several members of staff in the different organizations felt that they had limited knowledge about the work practices of collaborating police, border, and coast guard organizations. Such knowledge is important to avoid misunderstandings and confusion regarding how certain legal procedures is handled.

Different organizational backgrounds, legislation, confidentiality issues, and restrictions when providing other organizations with information are described as obstacles to collaboration. However, the participants did not view cultural, historical, or ethnic identity as obstacles to cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea area. Because of their shared motivation and similar goals, many officers highlighted few obstacles that directly affect collaboration. Nevertheless, many had encountered some difficulties regarding language barriers, differences in legislation, and rare opportunities for collocation. Language difficulties can prevent daily information exchange by obstructing officers who want to keep in contact with collaborating partners or delaying vital

intelligence information. Organizations need to adapt to environmental changes (Emery & Trist, 1965), and Project Turnstone can be regarded as response to the need for closer cooperation among police, border, and coast guard officers

in the EU and Schengen area. According to the participants in this study, the main challenges that the police, border, and coast guard officers identified can be eased and overcome through closer day-to-day work, education, and interpersonal exchange.

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