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From doorstep to dashboard: community-oriented policing, technology, and neighbourhood police officers

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Summary

This research examines the interaction between technology and community-oriented policing, focusing on the everyday practices of neighbourhood police officers in Belgium and the Netherlands. The study explores how technological tools are interpreted, adapted, and at times resisted in daily police work. The central research question guiding the research is: How does technology shape the way community-oriented policing unfolds in the actions of neighbourhood police officers?

Empirically, the research is based on comparative ethnographic research conducted within local police teams in both countries. The fieldwork involved shadowing neighbourhood police officers during patrols, meetings, administrative tasks, and interactions with citizens, both offline and through technological means.

The research highlights three key insights into the relationship between community-oriented policing and technology. First, technology reshapes proximity by blending digital engagement with face-to-face interaction, helping maintain community connections. Second, technology's impact is shaped by institutional and social factors, with neighbourhood officers playing a key role in how it is interpreted and integrated into practice. Third, neighbourhood police officers actively shape the role of technology, using their discretion to adapt or limit digital tools based on professional judgment and local knowledge.

Overall, the dissertation argues that technology's impact is socially and institutionally produced. Neighbourhood officers are not passive recipients of technological systems but active agents who interpret, adapt, and sometimes limit the use of technology. Community-oriented policing, therefore, demonstrates the ability to evolve within a digital context, provided that technology governance takes into account human agency, professional judgment, and the relational foundations of policing.