

Establishing a National Police Emergency Response Center: How Urgency Led to Delay

Abstract

This article describes and analyzes the decision-making process related to the establishment of Norway's national police emergency response center. Following the 22 July 2011 terrorist attacks, Norway's Inquiry Commission recommended the establishment of a national police emergency response center at one physical site. The goal was to enhance governance capacity and contribute to crisis mitigation, prevention, preparedness and operational crisis management. Although the main actors claimed that such a center was urgently needed, it took several years for the government to reach a final decision. . The main puzzle is, why did it take so long? To answer this question, we use a structural-instrumental perspective and a garbage-can approach, while also focusing on the issues of shifting attention and agenda-setting. We conclude that the decision-making process was marked by a lack of rational calculation but also influenced by external shocks, focusing events and windows of opportunities. This led to changing expectations, shifts in attention and opportunities for new agenda-setting. Hence, the choices made throughout the decision-making process can be seen as the linkage of a specific policy stream, a political stream and a problem stream. Our main conclusion is that the sense of urgency created by the terrorist attacks led to a delay in the decision-making process.

Introduction

Major crises or threats can influence policy agendas and bring about policy change (Birkland 2007), often leaving in their wake shifting ideas, organizational structures and instruments. A major question is how we can understand these changes and the processes leading to them. Frequently, crises lead to a focus on governance capacity and questions related to organization and how to organize the crisis management in a rational way (Kuipers et al. 2015, Christensen et al. 2016). According to Dahl and Lindblom (1953) this is related to two aspects: First, to control and administrative capacity, of which coordination is an important element (Lodge and Wegrich 2014). Administrative capacity and coordination is especially relevant when facing “wicked problems” characterized by complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity, such as societal security and crisis management (Carayannopoulos 2016; Christensen, Lægreid and Rykkja 2015; Head and Alford 2013). Second, to the capacity for ‘rational calculation’, i.e. being able to understand what solutions that could best solve the imminent problem(s). Related to this the *garbage can model* (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972) offers a supplementary interpretation of the complex processes in crisis management. According to this model, participants are part-time actors that go to and fro different choice opportunities. In this perspective, problems can be ambiguous and only loosely coupled to different solutions, and solutions may even come before problems. This emphasizes that it is rather difficult to predict the actions of individuals and also the results of decision-making processes. Hence, also the rationality behind the process may be questioned.

This article examines the decision-making process leading up to the proposed establishment of a specific organization intended to deal with certain crises: The National Police Emergency Response Center (NPERC) in Norway. The establishment of this center became a central debate in government and in the public after the devastating terrorist attacks in Oslo and at Utøya in 2011. The importance of control, capacity and coordination in crisis management was clearly seen following the terrorist attack in USA on 11 September 2001. It was also evident during and after the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011 (NOU 2012: 14). One of the many recommendations made by the Norwegian Inquiry Commission after those attacks was the establishment of the NPERC (Ibid.). The proposal led to an increased interest – in the Norwegian context – in an older question. In fact, the reorganization and localization of the emergency response resources had already been discussed by policymakers and stakeholders for more than ten years. The Commission reinvigorated that discussion with

a proposal on co-location. Neither elaborated on how this was to be done or explained to any great length why this would be a good solution.

After the Commission had published its report in 2012, the political executive promised a quick decision-making process and the rapid implementation of the necessary measures to establish such a center, emphasizing that this was demanded by the urgency of the situation. However, at the time of writing this article, the NPERC has yet to materialize. For a long time it remained unclear when and where the center should be built, and discussions focused heavily on the site, the scope, the size and the functions of the unit. In October 2016, the Norwegian government finally announced that a site been found. The proposed center will co-locate the emergency helicopter services, the emergency response unit, also called Delta, the bomb squad and the crisis and hostage negotiation service – all of which are police units, on a specific location outside the capital Oslo.

This article describes and analyzes the decision-making process related to the establishment of this center. In particular, we examine whether and how the process changed after the terrorist attacks. The research questions are:

- Why did the decision-making process take so long? Did urgency due to the 2011 terrorist acts, in fact, lead to delay?
- How was the process organized? That is: Who were the major political and administrative actors involved and how did the main actor pattern change over time, how did they determine the location of the center and define its functions, and were problems and solutions clearly defined or were they rather ambiguous and fluid?
- How can we explain the decision-making process based on the dynamics between the structural-instrumental and garbage-can perspective?

Starting from organizational theory in public administration, our argument is that formal and physical structure can interact in various ways and will have consequences for both policy processes and outputs (Egeberg 2012). Although structural choices may have important implications, there is no single optimal way of organizing for emergency preparedness (Christensen et al. 2016). In essence, a political and administrative choice is normally made in the context of the type of crisis, the existing organization and historical tradition, and other situational and contextual factors.

From a structural-instrumental perspective, we examine the structural constraints and whether the decision-making process was characterized by hierarchical control or negotiations, and how clearly the goals, problems and solutions were defined. From a

garbage-can perspective, we investigate to what extent contextual features influenced the process, making it unpredictable and slow, and the impact, if any, of symbols (March and Olsen 1976). Based on the end result it seems that we can draw a comparison with Aesop's well-known fable "The Hare and the Tortoise", where the hare runs into difficulties and is faced with a situation of "the more haste, the less speed". According to the fable, had the hare been slow and steady like the tortoise and not so hasty, it might have been more successful.

We also seek to determine if the literature on agenda-setting, agenda-shifting and the politics of attention can contribute to the understanding of the process. Our main argument is that a combination of a garbage can model and structural constraints, together with a focus on agenda-setting issues, can contribute to a better understanding of the lengthy process of establishing the NPERC. Thus, the situational analysis from a garbage can approach is consciously combined with a more structural instrumental approach (Mucciaroni 2012).

Our sources are the relevant public documents, the secondary literature, qualitative interviews with administrative executives and media coverage. First, we explain the theoretical perspectives from which we analyzed the decision-making process. Second, we define the context in which the proposal was developed. Third, we describe how the process evolved over time. Fourth, we draw some conclusions about the usefulness of the theoretical perspectives we start from.

The theoretical perspectives

The core theoretical issue in this article is why the implementation of the measures required for the establishment of the NPERC took so long despite the stated urgency in the immediate aftershock of the 2011 terrorist attacks. The main question we seek to answer is this: Could it be that the stated urgency in fact delayed the decision-making process? This is counter-intuitive: Urgency can normally be expected to galvanize important political actors and other public capacities. Therefore, one would expect the early announcement of an organizational solution to materialize rather quickly. Much of the literature on organizational change in fact sees urgency as crucial to successful organizational change (Fernandez and Rainy 2006); not least, it helps to align stakeholders and focus their attention. Thus, in line with an instrumental approach, urgency will reduce delays because it concentrates the minds of powerful actors. In this article we argue that this is only one side of the story. Urgency can also accentuate uncertain preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation, more in line with the garbage-can perspective (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). In fact, crises tend to reduce the capacity for rational decision-making based on clear and stable goals, reliable information and

evidence-based policymaking. The situation becomes unsettled and fluid; there is more ambiguity and uncertainty, and a sense of urgency (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). This is the case especially in more intractable crises, defined as being difficult to both predict and handle (Gundel 2005). The 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway are examples of such a crisis.

A *structural-instrumental perspective* is used to understand the organizational thinking or rational calculation of central political and administrative actors, and to analyze the organization of the process and the actor and influence pattern (Dahl and Lindblom 1953). We focus on how the actors defined the problems and came up with solutions. Were the solutions broadly based or did they zoom in on a specific response at an early stage? From a bounded rationality approach (March and Simon 1958), it can be assumed that the actions of decision-makers are informed by the logic of consequentiality but at the same time constrained by the complexity of the situation, the lack of full information and the routinization of decisions. Therefore, they will tend to make decisions that are regarded as satisfactory rather than completely rational. Heterogeneity and negotiations among actors can feed into the decision-making process, too (March and Olsen 1983). From the structural-instrumental perspective, the decision-making process would be expected to be characterized by analytical planning, focusing on both the formal organizational model and the location. One would accordingly expect a tight linkage between overall goals, options and consequences as well as between the problem structure and the proposed organization and physical structure. One would also expect decision-makers to have power and control over the process and possess evidence-based knowledge of means-end relations.

The *garbage-can perspective* on the other hand, focuses on the temporality of decision-making processes (Cohen et al. 1972, March and Olsen 1976). It has also earlier been used to examine crisis response (Lee Clark 1989). In contrast with the structural-instrumental perspective, which is based on the logic of consequentiality, the garbage-can perspective is based on the logic of simultaneity and timing. This takes into account that external events can lead to changes in decision-making processes because ‘windows of opportunity’ open (Kingdon 1984). Following from this, historical paths change. These are developments that are reflected in changing patterns of influence, including changes in actors, problems and solutions. ‘Focusing events’ or sudden shocks, such as terrorist attacks, often cause such changes, but does not necessarily imply more rationality (Birkland 2007, Birkland and DeYoung 2015). In this way, a specific *problem stream* initiated by unforeseen events, such as terrorist attacks, may be linked to a certain *policy stream* of actors who promote specific policy options and solutions, and a *political stream* of executives within the political

establishment who normally face far more issues than they actually can handle (Kingdon 1984).

The garbage-can perspective thus implies that political and administrative actors may experience problems of capacity and attention because they are part-time participants, creating ambiguous goals and preferences, unclear technologies and fluid participation. This may lead to collective irrationality, as exemplified by Allison (1971). It may also lead to unpredictable results of the existing decision-making processes. It follows that *agenda-setting* and *allocation of attention* will make a difference (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). This takes into account that coexisting issues compete for attention from key participants. From this follows that the attention paid by political executives to certain issues is potentially a key factor in understanding decision-making processes, assuming that attention is a limited resource and key actors are affected by the dynamics of “attention-shifting”. Allocation of attention is often constrained by thresholds of importance based on urgency. These thresholds tend to be context-sensitive, resulting in an inefficient system whose responses are not always proportional to the intensity of current external signals.

Processes of “punctuated equilibrium” – i.e. large shifts in attention occurring after long periods of stability – can be important for understanding the decision-making process (Baumgartner and Jones 2009). Thus exogenous shocks may enhance and change political attention and uncover critical policy issues that demand political intervention (Boushey 2015). The attention perspective is preoccupied with the use of symbols and temporality – i.e. symbols replacing actions or actions taking new paths because of their symbolic value.

A final argument based on the garbage-can perspective is that solutions may present themselves before problems emerge (March and Olsen 1976). This contrast with the structural-instrumental perspective, whereby problems always come before solutions. The garbage can approach and Kingdon’s model has not really addressed the issue of how urgency lead to delay. In this article we supplement Kingdon’s approach by examining structural constraints and also address the linkages between the different streams of problems, policies and politics. Rather than looking at them as loosely coupled we examine how they are connected (Mucciaroni 2012).

Context

The Norwegian police has always been a unitary and unarmed community agency focusing on enforcing law and order, carrying out investigations and, where necessary, bringing charges, rather than a being a force mainly dealing with emergency response. Norwegian

citizens' confidence in the national police force has been – and remains – strong (Christensen and Lægreid 2015). Major emergency situations and crises have been few and far apart. Until 2001 the police force was directly subordinated to the Ministry of Justice. Since then it has been directly subordinated to the National Police Directorate (NPD), which was established in 2001 under the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. The NPD has an administrative, strategic and operational role in situations demanding emergency response. Traditionally, the police districts have enjoyed a large degree of autonomy. They assume the decentralized responsibility for the emergency response function and in this role are supplemented by a small specialized national unit. Beyond the police force, military and civilian emergency resources could, in theory, be merged to deal with emergency situations, but such structures have been difficult to establish in practice in the Norwegian context (Lægreid and Serigstad 2006, NOU 2012:14).

The 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway can be seen as a “focusing event” that created a window of opportunity for a change in the organizational structure of the emergency units. Norway was struck by two terrorist attacks of a magnitude unprecedented within the country. A bomb explosion in the central government complex destroyed several buildings, including that of the Ministry of Justice. Later that day, a large number of young people from the Labor Party's youth organization attending a camp on the island of Utøya were shot. In total, 77 people died. Many were seriously injured. The attacks, carried out by the same individual, came as a terrible shock in a country normally seen as a peaceful and open democracy (Fimreite et al. 2013, Rykkja et al. 2011). Moreover, they struck at the very core of the country's democratic institutions, thereby also putting the police under great pressure (Christensen and Lægreid 2015).

The political context can be important for the decision-making process, since it makes some solutions more likely than others. From 2005 to 2013 Norway had a majority coalition government led by the Labor Party and including the Center and the Socialist Left Party. This coalition lost support in the 2013 general election and was replaced by a minority coalition consisting of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party.

Also relevant to the decision-making process in this context is a formal quality assessment (QA) procedure, mandatory for all government projects where costs exceed 750 million NOK (about 90 million US dollars) (Christensen 2011). The process is administered by the Minister of Finance. The planned budget for the NPERC exceeds these costs and therefore require a QA. The QA has three phases: 1) A ‘concept choice phase’ – a professional assessment, carried out mostly by government agencies, defining needs, goals,

demands, strategies, possibilities and alternatives; 2) A 'QA1' process, in which private prequalified firms assess the concept choice report and make professional recommendations to the government, who then decide whether to approve the project; and 3) A 'QA2' process, which kicks in if government approval is forthcoming, where a more technical pre-project report is drawn up also with the help of independent experts. In the end, for a project to be launched, the parliament must formally endorse the QA2 report. Below, we explicate how the QA procedure was implemented in the case of the NPERC.

Agenda-setting – a lack of attention: before the terrorist attack in 2011

The idea of establishing a police emergency response center had already been raised back in 1994. At that time, the issue was generally considered to be an internal police matter and it was difficult to attract the attention of politicians to it (Haugstveit 2016). In 2001, the parliament voted to establish a 24/7 emergency police helicopter service, thereby triggering a broader political debate on how to organize the emergency response resources. The idea of establishing an emergency response center and co-locating it with the emergency response unit came later. The police argued for the establishment of a special organizational unit similar to existing units within the police force and wanted it to be located closer to the capital, Oslo. In 2007, the police chose *Alna*, a borough in the eastern part of the capital city, as the preferred location of the center. For the next few years, the Oslo police urged for both the emergency response unit (the Delta Force) and the helicopter services to be co-located there.

Early in 2011 plans for establishing a national police emergency response center got moving: In February, the NPD was ordered by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to analyze the possibility of locating the NPERC at Alna. A complicating factor was that the Ministry of Transport and Communications had already earmarked the area for railway purposes. Settling on the location was seen as essential to resolving a functional issue: the main aims of moving the helicopters to Oslo and co-locating them with the Delta Force was to establish a shorter response time than could be achieved with men and equipment scattered in various locations, and to establish better training facilities. Resolving this issue dominated the decision-making process that followed. With the main focus on the need to build a center in or near Oslo, the most important thing was to find and agree on a location. Which units were to be located at the center was not entirely clear at this stage (Haugstveit 2016).

Urgency and high on the political agenda: August 2011 – September 2012

The public Inquiry after the July 2011 terrorist attacks (NOU 2012: 14) heavily criticized the police. The report of the Inquiry Commission, published in August 2012, emphasized that the police were neither sufficiently trained nor prepared for emergencies. Coordination and communication as well as the ability to implement decisions were all deemed weak. The story told was one in which “the emergency resources did not find one another”. According to the Commission, the leadership ability and willingness to establish who was responsible and accountable and the ability to take measures to achieve the required results were lacking. The Commission recommended that the existing plans for the establishment of the NPERC be implemented. This recommendation was immediately followed up by the executive: Already on 28 August, the Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister announced to the parliament that the government had allocated a site at Alna for the emergency response center.

This shows that the level of political attention to the NPERC changed radically after the 2011 terrorist attacks. Societal security and crisis management were now at the top of the political agenda and both influenced and expedited the decision-making process. Just six weeks after the attacks, the Minister of Justice sent a letter to the Minister of Transport and Communications urging the ministry to quickly draw its conclusions about the suitability of the Alna option. At the same time, the Minister of Justice also appointed an internal working group to assess the organization of the ministry’s emergency arrangements. The report from this group, submitted in January 2012, proposed that the plans for establishing an emergency response center in the Oslo police district should be followed through (Bleikelia 2012, Jensen 2016). The main arguments for doing so were the more efficient use of resources and a shorter response time. Five months after the terrorist attacks, the Minister of Justice sent a letter to the chairman of the special parliamentary committee set up after the terrorist attacks announcing that the planning for the NPERC in the Oslo police district was under way. The importance of establishing such a center was further underscored in a White Paper in June 2012 (Meld. St. 29 (2011–2012)). In December 2012, the Minister of Justice asked the Norwegian Directorate of Public Construction and Property (*Statsbygg*), a government agency that is responsible for physical locations belonging to the state, to assess whether there were other suitable locations for the center. Their report, presented in April 2012, looked at 17 options, singled out four and chose Alna since it was the only option that in their opinion could be implemented relatively quickly.

To meet the recommendation by the Inquiry Commission, the government decided to fast-track the required QA procedure. It bypassed the QA1 report and went straight to dealing

with the more technical pre-project report (QA2). Based on the lessons learned from a previous security project that had been poorly implemented (Christensen, Læg Reid and Rykkja 2016b), it also decided to circumvent the regular municipal planning process in Oslo and handle the case at the ministerial level. The underlying argument was that centralizing responsibility would speed up overall planning. The top political executives of government, for its part, decided that it would oversee the planning, which went against the advice of parts of the central government apparatus: According to Prime Minister Stoltenberg, the Ministry of Finance had warned not to “frantically throw money after emergency projects without having a good analysis as a fundament”; however, the ministry was overruled by the cabinet (Stoltenberg 2016).

The Oslo police, backed by the NPD, argued strongly for the Alna location, pointing to the time pressure and the need to quickly get the NPERC up and running. On the basis of the Inquiry Commission’s report and under pressure from the parliament, the government decided for Alna. Both the prime minister and the Minister of Justice emphasized that speedy decision-making speed was necessary; and the latter announced that the emergency response center would be built by 2017 at a cost of 1 billion NOK.

In August 2012, the Ministry of Transport and Communications informed the railway agencies that the Alna site had been allocated to the police force. According to *Statsbygg*, it would take eight years to implement the project. The Oslo police, which wanted to give the contract to a property company owned by Railway Norway (ROM) in order to speed up the process, challenged that assertion. In March 2013, the NPD informed the Minister of Justice that the emergency response center at Alna could probably not be realized on the site allocated by *Statsbygg* the previous year because it was not big enough and that a site twice the size was needed. It was explained that there had been a misunderstanding about the net and gross size of the needed buildings. This generated a sense of insecurity, and there were several tense clarification meetings between the various actors involved. Subsequently, responsibility for the project was then transferred from the Oslo police to the NPD.

Back to square one: October 2013 – September 2017

The coalition government that came to power in 2013 confirmed in its political platform the commitment to establishing an NPERC and that it was aiming for a “synergy effect”. At the same time, it identified a major failure in the QA procedure on the basis of which Alna was chosen: in the assessment, the size of the planned buildings had been estimated at just over half of what was in fact needed. Moreover, the space required might increase further. The

chairman of the parliamentary Standing Committee for Justice, who was deputy leader of the Labor Party, argued that *Statsbygg* had been responsible for the calculation blunder in 2013. According to *Statsbygg*, the “misunderstanding” came from the Oslo police, the ROM property company and the railway agency. This accusation was, however, refuted.

In the summer of 2014, the Minister of Justice received a new report from the NPD suggesting that the NPERC should be located at Grønmo instead of Alna. The strategy pursued was a two-pronged one, examining whether the Alna site could eventually be expanded and looking for other alternatives, also outside Oslo. This meant largely starting from scratch. The new government argued that it wanted to speed up the implementation of the plans for the NPERC, but nevertheless indicated that the center could not be opened until two years later than the former government had promised. At this point, the parliamentary Control Committee became involved and asked the Minister of Justice to explain the situation. He responded by referring to the earlier circumventions of the normal QA procedure, and stressed that the functionality of the center depended on its size and calling for several units to be co-located.

The new government returned to the formal QA procedure, and the concept choice assessment was finalized in December 2014, followed in August 2015 by a new QA1 report. Early on, several weaknesses in this process were identified. Genuine decision-making alternatives were lacking and therefore another version of the concept report had to be drawn up. At this point, a mandatory requirement was included on localization ensuring appropriate operational conditions for police helicopters. The report also made demands related to the co-location of units, the establishment of an outdoor shooting range, training facilities for responding to terrorist attacks and regulations on response times. It also discussed whether the center should have supplementary units in other big cities outside Oslo, or mobile teams, but concluded that co-location in Oslo was the best option, pointing out that other countries had chosen such a solution. Finally, the report proposed that four units were co-located; the emergency helicopter services, the Delta Force, the bomb squad and the crisis and hostage negotiation service. The NPERC was to have the formal status of a special unit under the NPD. Two possible locations were named – Alna and Grønmo. A complicating factor was, however, that the Grønmo site was a former landfill for the city of Oslo and had been designated by the municipal authorities as a recreational area for the city’s inhabitants. Several experts warned against building the center at this location.

The QA1 report seemed to inject yet more uncertainty. The Grønmo option was supported but considerations related to quality, costs and time schedule had to be taken into

account. Furthermore, a third option (Taraldrud in a neighboring municipality to Oslo) was mentioned, though not included in the report. In the last phase of the QA1 procedure, the NPD stressed that it did not support the minimum version of the Grønmo option.

In late 2015, the deputy leader of the Labor Party urged the government to clarify where the NPERC should be located and when it could be finished. Once again, time seemed to take precedence over quality, while the government – having opened up the process – was looking more at functionality and costs (Haugstveit 2016). What is interesting is that the deputy leader echoed the criticism that had been voiced in the parliament one year earlier against the then Labor-dominated government. Thus, both before and after the change of government, the parliament was a driving force for speeding up the process. In September 2015, the Minister of Justice announced that the Alna option was no longer considered viable as it was too expensive and the site too small. So that left Grønmo and Taraldrud as the alternatives.

In February 2016, the Prime Minister told the parliament that it was difficult to say when the NPERC could be finished but indicated that it was likely to be in 2020. She stressed that the process was back on track after having been sidelined for some time; and in July, the Minister of Justice suggested that construction was likely to be completed in 2022. In a newspaper interview the same month, the Prime Minister stated that the center had been “a nightmare for [her] government” (VG, 11 July). She blamed the former government for having been in a hurry and cutting corners in the regular planning process, but at the same time she conceded that hopes had been pinned for too long on the Alna option and this had prolonged the process.

The same group of private consultants and architects who had drafted the plans for Alna in 2014 was selected two years later, in 2016, to carry out a feasibility study for both Grønmo and Taraldrud. In October 2016, the group submitted a report concluding that Taraldrud was the most suitable option based on response time, mobilization force and training facilities. The government readily accepted its findings and on 21 October announced that the decision had been taken to go for the Taraldrud option. A QA2 report is expected later in 2017. The preliminary project is estimated to cost 100 million NOK and is forecast to be completed in 2020.

After five years of searching, the location for the NRCP has finally been nailed down. The original plans have been expanded to include an urban-warfare training village as well as an outdoor and indoor shooting range. The estimated costs have now increased from 1 billion NOK to 2.5 billion NOK (in 2015 terms) and the site covers a total of 33,000 square meters.

But it remains unclear when the center will be built. So far, no money has been allocated for the project to be implemented in full.

In April 2017, the government and the owners of the land at Taraldrud were still negotiating about the sale price for that land which resulted in an expropriation. In May 2017, a proposal for a state regulation plan drawn up by the private consultancy *Asplan Viak* was submitted to the affected stakeholders for consideration; the deadline for comments was the end of June 2017.

During his presentation of the proposed regulation plan, the Minister of Justice commented that the current government had managed to make good progress on the project despite having had to start all over again on entering office. However, local protests have erupted during the summer of 2017, basically about noise for the neighbors generally and a school specifically. The proposed state regulation plan received more than 1200 comments. The final state regulation plan is said to have accommodated some of those concerns. But the local protests became an issue in the general election campaign in 2017. The government parties, the Conservatives and the Progress Party lead by the Minister of Justice stressed the need to avoid further delays, but the supporting Liberal Party has promised full support for the local concerns. The same was the case for the opposition parties: The Centre Party, the Greens, the Red and the Socialist Left Party. Also the Labour party promised during the campaign to take the local protests more seriously something that the project leader has said potentially could delay the building of the center by another two years. The Solberg minority government was reelected in September 2017 but with a weaker support in the Parliament. Meanwhile, a parliamentary debate on the new emergency response center is scheduled for the fall of 2017.

Thus the project, which began as a somewhat limited initiative within the Oslo police force in the 1990s, has expanded into a huge undertaking – in terms of scope, size and resources – and has moved to near the top of political agenda. Table 1 below provides a schematic overview of the three phases in the planning of the NPERC.

Table 1. Schematic overview of the overall NPERC planning process, mid-1990s – present

	Phase 1: Before the July 2011 terrorist attack	Phase 2: The Stoltenberg government, late July 2011 – September 2013	Phase 3: The Solberg government, October 2013 – Sep. 2017
Main actors	The Oslo police, along with the parliament and the National Police Directorate (hence small number of actors)	The Inquiry Commission, the Minister of Justice, the prime minister, the parliament, the police agency, <i>Statsbygg</i>	The parliament, the prime minister, the Minister of Justice, private consultants', local protests
Agenda-setting and level of attention	Low on the political agenda; lack of attention	Very high on the political agenda	High on the political agenda
Constant (non-variable)	Integrated and co-located emergency response center in Oslo	Integrated and co-located emergency response center in Oslo	Integrated and co-located emergency response center in Oslo
Policy stream: solution – location	Policy stream established; Alna selected as location	Policy stream strong; Alna reconfirmed as location	Policy stream strong; new location sought: options are Grønmo and Taraldrud; decision made on Taraldrud in 2016
Political stream	Weak	Very strong	Strong
Problem stream	Strengthening the police emergency helicopter unit	Strengthening coordination and delivering capacity, reducing response time (“focusing event”)	Finding an appropriate localization for the Emergency Response Center Local protests against noise
Level of urgency	Low	High	High
Indication of level of urgency	-	Bypassing the central QA and municipal regulation processes	Reintroducing the central QA procedure and bypassing the local planning process
Planned scope	Rather narrow (emergency helicopter service co-located with Delta Force)	Broader in functions and size	Even broader (33,000 square meters, including outdoor and indoor shooting ranges and urban-warfare training village)
Estimated cost	?	1 billion NOK	2.5 billion NOK
Planned completion	?	2017	2020

Analysis

A rational and well-structured process?

First, we focus on how the planning process was *organized*. The formal QA procedure for large public projects like the NPERC is intended to ensure that the political center has influence over such projects and that the decision-making process is more elaborate and quality-oriented through the participation of independent experts from the private sector (Christensen 2011). The first government involved in the NPERC planning project, however, decided not to follow this formal three-part process in full: rather, it skipped to the last part (QA2) in order to save time, which later on turned out to undermine the rationality in the process. The decision to establish an integrated emergency response center in Oslo had already been taken by the political executive in keeping with the recommendations by the Inquiry Commission. The important task now was to establish it as soon as possible. The politicians relied largely on the Commission's recommendations. The main rationale for preferring Alna was that the center could be finished earlier – reasoning that was wholly understandable but potentially posed problems. When this option proved unfeasible, primarily because of the limited space available, they had to return to the first QA phase and start another concept choice process. The initial cutting of corners seems to have contributed to weak quality assessment. The experts failed to take sufficient account of the size of the center. At the same time, the room for maneuver granted to them by the political executive was rather narrow. In the end, urgency undermined the rationality of the process.

The next government, which took office in 2013 and included new political actors, followed the formal QA procedure. However, the result was still problematic. During the first two years the concept choice assessment (QA1) and preparations for the pilot process were on-going. The existence of three location options slowed down the process. The Alna option was still in the running, which was not easy to understand from a rational point of view. The Grønmo option, which had become the new preference, ran into obstacles. And Taraldrud, though promising as an alternative, was tabled later and thus was not part of the original QA. For these reasons, the QA procedure failed initially to do what it was supposed to – namely, provide at least one sound and viable option. Rather, it stumbled from one more or less viable option to another. Later on, the QA procedure was deployed more in accordance to the expected procedure and time frame. A shortcoming was the lack of interaction between the political executive and the independent experts. Issues related to the suggested locations should have been clarified earlier with important stakeholders – that is, the various

responsible ministries, the Oslo municipal authorities as well as the local communities at Tarlarud. Neglecting to do so had a negative impact on the decision-making process and slowed it down.

The second focus of our analysis is the *activation of the various actors* in the decision-making process (March and Olsen 1976). Indeed, the process was rather a narrow one in terms of the actors involved. It began as a police project run by the Oslo police force and later the NPD assumed the lead role. After the July 2011 terrorist attacks, it was handled at a high political level – both the prime ministers and the ministers of justice were significantly involved, one experienced arena-shifting. Members of the police force played more of a supporting role, perhaps because there was already agreement on the solution they had wanted. However, this situation caused problems related to rationality and attention. *Statsbygg* was supposed to provide the state expertise in the first round, but it failed to detect the space limitations, as did the independent experts. In the second round of the process (QA1), both the NPD and the consulting firm PwC were involved, but political decisions apparently trumped the expert opinions. It is also interesting that the affected police units and the Norwegian Police Federation played only minor roles in the second round. This was partly because urgency led the process to be played out at a higher, political level, which potentially undermined the rationality in the process because important expertise was decoupled from the process.

A third focus is the *definition process*, i.e. how the problems and solutions were defined and how they eventually changed during the decision-making process (March and Olsen 1976). The scope of the process was rather narrow. The different locations were discussed only late in the QA1 process. There was never a broad discussion about functionality in terms of location and the formal organization of the new unit was mentioned only briefly. Even though the QA1 report alluded to possible vertical, inter-organizational solutions at the regional/local level, but these options were not discussed in detail. The formal solution indicated combining vertical inter-organizational specialization (i.e. a special administrative unit subordinated to the NPD) and horizontal inter-organizational coordination (former separate units merging to form the NPERC).

The same applies to formal and physical reorganization. Physically separate units at the regional/local level were suggested, but in the end the decision for structural merging and co-location was made. This indicates that the definition of the *problems*, the coordinated actions and the response time, remained the same over a long period (stable), while the *solutions* with regard to the location fluctuated and were ambiguous, showing challenges to

the rationality of the process. At the same time, the specific organization model was more or less stable and was neither analyzed nor discussed to any great extent. The integrated model suggested by the police was accepted without further ado ~~taken for granted~~ and no alternative organization models were considered. Since a solution appeared to have been found, urgency led to a focus on physical location. Unfortunately, it was the choice of the physical location that ran into problems and ultimately delayed the process.

Overall, the decision-making process was poorly structured and strongly biased towards the question of location. The activation process was initially a rather closed internal police affair but later was opened up to include the stronger engagement and commitment of the political leadership as well as the involvement of independent experts and consultants. The quality of the analysis varied throughout the process which was constrained by different institutional, regulative and procedural constraints. In the first phase, the analysis failed largely owing to the urgency of the undertaking, the misunderstandings and the bypassing of the regular planning procedure. This led to ambiguities in the following quality assessment of the project. Thus, there were several shortcomings in the analytical planning process.

A garbage-can process?

From a garbage-can perspective, the following question would be asked: What happened to make the process take such an unexpected direction and last so long? Lack of attention to the issue of an NPERC among both politicians and the government apparatus was obvious before the July 2011 terrorist attacks. The experience of those attacks sped up the process, as did the recommendation included in the Inquiry Commission's report in 2012 to build the NPERC. These events opened a 'window of opportunity' and prompted the political executive to accelerate the process without any solid basis since the analysis in the report was rather shallow. This, in turn, led to the bypassing of the formal QA procedure, which meant the various options were not adequately assessed, resulting in unclear technology related to the physical location and internal police functions. And it was because of this speeding up and taking short cuts that the overall process slowed down. Moreover, there were repercussions for the next government, which involved a new set of actors who began their formal quality assessment with an option that was not viable, having inherited the unclear technology from the previous government. Two alternatives were subsequently offered, but both were problematic; and the more promising of the two was suggested late in the process. In sum, the speed at which the process was followed and the inadequate quality assurance work seem to

have wrong-footed the political executive and eventually stalled the decision-making process – both because of urgency and fluid participation.

It can also be argued that this was a case of the solution coming before the problem (March and Olsen 1976). The Oslo police had a ‘solution’ and was looking for a problem to match it. Thus the NPERC solution was accepted virtually automatically and the center itself came to symbolize the ability to take action. The solution was Oslo-centered and did not take into account the needs of the rest of the country. Ideally, before any possible formal and physical solutions were discussed there should have been a broad discussion on how to realize the emergency response function, which would have increased the rational calculation. Instead, the process started with the answer rather than the question, which contributed to the process being stalled.

From a garbage-can perspective, the decision-making process can be seen as a linking of three streams (Kingdon 1984, Greer 2015). First, there was the *policy stream*, in which civil servants and experts within the police force discussed and formulated policy options while the issue itself remained little known in the political world. For their part, the police were seeking ways to promote their preference and had a solution at hand, which they were ready to subject to the spotlight of the political executive. Thereafter followed the *political stream*, which was dominated by the political executive and its expert advisers whose motivation was to satisfy the voters in particular and the citizens in general and to capture the “national mood” at the time. All political parties, both those in government and those in opposition, had an interest in doing something after the terrorist attacks. A complicating factor was that political leaders tend to suffer from ‘attention overload’. Thus a core question is how they decide on their agenda. A reason for choosing a particular policy solution is needed. And it was the *problem stream* – which comprised the unforeseen problems in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks – that provided such a reason. The attacks revealed coordination difficulties within the police and became ‘focusing events’ that brought the public’s attention to the problems and made a coordinated collocated solution viable. Some have even argued that the problems were so severe that the allegory of a ‘geyser’ perhaps was a more appropriate term than a ‘stream’ (Greer 2015).

The allocation of attention is crucial in cases like this one. The responses from and the actions of key policymakers are important to understanding the process. How they played their role, how information was used and interpreted, how attention was allocated to the issue and how the government bodies responded to this information is essential in this context. In a situation where there is an information overload, the core political and administrative

executives have limited attention spans and can process only so much information. The situation is even more challenging in complex structures. Organizations tend to focus on prioritized problems and solutions that are considered relevant and appropriate. The information overload will often lead to attention inefficiency, indicating that local rationality does not always become collective rationality (Allison 1971).

Agenda-setting was another important part of the decision-making process, triggered by the terrorist attacks. The process can therefore not be seen as an elaborate technical one but rather as a series of overlapping stages in which the various stakeholders engaged in conflicts over competing values and objectives. The same can be said about other settings in the aftermath of a crisis – for example, in the US after 9/11 (Cuellar 2013).

The opening of the window of opportunity came as something of a surprise and offered a new chance to push forward with the police's proposal. Indeed, the political climate happened to be a good one for this purpose. Attention to the issue increased and expectations about the government's ability – and its responsibility – to prevent and manage crises grew. The national mood changed and the NPERC idea moved up the political agenda. The politicians got a solution on their table. Thus the problem, the solution and politics all came together at a crucial point in time.

The terrorist attacks drew more attention to some issues than to others, however. The police had a solution at hand which was supposed to solve the problem that had occurred and the Inquiry Commission embraced that solution without much of an analysis. In addition, the terrorist attacks paved the way for more funding for the emergency issues in the police. Thus timing was important. The proposal had “floated around” in the policy stream for many years but suddenly appeared on the central governmental agenda when it offered a fitting solution to a now pressing problem (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). The various participants brought their problems and solutions to the table, hoping that they would be adopted. But the outcome was unpredictable. This is typically the case when there is a loose linkage between problems, solutions and political support. If there is a change of government and the decision-making process becomes prolonged, there is a danger that the window of opportunity will close again.

The decision-making process related to the establishment of the NPERC can be seen as an incomplete analytical planning process. Policy attention was central, and a linkage of the policy stream, the political stream and the problem stream is evident. The process started as an internal issue within the Oslo police force; but for many years, it was difficult to draw the attention of the political and administrative executives to the issue. After the July 2011 terrorist attacks, the situation changed dramatically. Now the sense of urgency was a crucial

factor. The recommendation by the Inquiry Commission to establish the NPERC was adopted almost automatically but this yielded the potential for irrationality. Politicians were facing an acute problem and wanted to act quickly; they did not want to risk being blamed for having done nothing and had to deliver results before the next election. Consequently, they bypassed the formal QA procedure. However, taking this shortcut backfired and the bureaucracy “struck back” and reinstated the regular procedures. Thus, the overall decision-making process was also shaped by the bureaucracy following established routines.

Somewhat paradoxically, urgency led to delay rather than acceleration. Over time, the solution became less clear and more expensive. More problems were attached to the solution, and space and location – i.e. ‘unclear technology’ – became major issues. For politicians, the NPERC became an important symbol of the ability to take action, which undermined the rationality of the process.

The establishment of the NPERC was not only a question of governance capacity but also of governance legitimacy and societal accountability. In the wake of the July 2011 terrorist attacks, voices across the political spectrum and throughout the public at large called for the government to be better prepared and to respond more quickly and efficiently to such crises in the future (Roberts 2013). The attacks affected citizens’ risk acceptance and crisis attention while politicians’ promises to citizens were increasingly fueled by the sense of urgency. This, in turn, enhanced the public’s expectations of what government bodies – especially the police – could and should do. In the end, all the goals, promises and expectations exceeded the capacity of government agencies to quickly make reliable decisions about the new national emergency center. The result was delay – not despite of, but *because* of all the urgency.

Summing up, we argue that the basically institution-free garbage can model has to be supplemented by structural features (Pagdett 1980, Jann 2015). The structure and biases of the political, policy and problem streams have to be taken into consideration (Greer 2015). Also the interlinkages between the streams are important. Rather than seeing them as loosely coupled, they are interconnected. The focusing event lead to intense attention to organization issues. However, rather than resulting in reforms pushed through at a high pace, it lead to a politicizing of the issue. Thus, assuming a direct link between a focusing event and reform is problematic. Our case shows that focusing events lead to urgency, but this can then produce delay. It also demonstrates that the evaluation of an issue on the agenda might activate different views from different actors on how to describe the problem, which then also can

create different stories about what should be done (Lawrence and Birkland 2004, Birkland and Lawrence 2009).

Conclusion

Our analysis shows, somewhat counter-intuitively, that the reason why this lengthy decision-making process was bogged down by ready-made solutions, unclear goals, fluid participation and unclear technology – all of which are typical of the garbage-can perspective – is related to the urgency of the situation following the terrorist attacks of July 2011. Urgency defined the process of establishing the NPERC. The Inquiry Commission promoted a solution that had already been preferred by the police for some time. This, however, seems to be something that later on actually undermined the rationality of the process, especially since the report did not contain any solid analysis to support the claim. Therefore, questions that normally would be fundamental for a rational and clear-cut instrumental definition process – what are the main goals being pursued, what kind of formal and physical solutions are available, and what impact will they have? – were never asked. Moreover, participation was fluid and attention limited. Central figures from the police force were involved in the early stages but seemed to disappear along the way. Politicians from two governments were more heavily involved; and despite having different goals, they advocated the same organizational solutions. Public and private sector experts became involved, but their narrow mandates and the prevailing sense of urgency may well have led to poor quality in the planning process. Furthermore, technology was “unclear” in different ways. The simple approach of assessing goals, alternative solutions and their effects was never pursued. The formal QA procedure was followed only partly, and the experts failed to offer viable physical and functional solutions.

Our study shows that the main lesson to be drawn is that while urgency often facilitates quick decision-making and implementation processes – not least because important actors are more readily committed and act swiftly – it may also lead to prolonged and more problematic processes. The use of the garbage-can theory combined with the more structural-instrumental perspective makes it easier to understand factors and mechanisms that yield such a counter-intuitive result. The focusing event and the streams of problems, policy and politics are important to understand the process. But also structural and institutional features play an important role, in our case exemplified by the police, the formal QA procedures and the choice of a government regulation plan. Also the structure and bias of the different streams and the interconnections between them has to be taken into consideration.

Starting the decision-making process with an organizational solution and without any clear goals and being driven by a sense of urgency led to a deviation from a more normal and rational means-ends process. This, in turn, made the decision-making process biased towards the issue of physical location, which resulted in the irrational hopping from one unsuitable location to the other. Unclear technology – also driven by the sense of urgency – combined with not following the formal QA procedure and failing to clarify the functional and physical design of the center compounded the problems. Actors coming and going and promoting solutions ahead of problems (once again because of the urgency) was another part of the equation. Thus typical ‘garbage-can’ elements – uncertain preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation – combined, in a dynamic relationship, with the sense of urgency explains the problematic and prolonged decision-making process.

A second lesson, related to the first one, is that shifting attention and agenda-setting can impact the decision-making process. A focusing event, the terrorist attacks in 2011, made a difference. A political stream was activated in addition to the already existing policy and problem streams. Coordination and delivering capacity moved higher up on the political agenda. The choices made can be seen as linking these streams in the aftermath of the focusing event. A strong sense of urgency was created, perceived both as capacity constraints and legitimacy demands. Something significant had to be done fast. The paradox is that the urgency – not least as perceived and acted upon by the political executive – led to a delay in meeting the bureaucracy’s felt duty to follow the appropriate procedures. This leads us back to the Aesop’s fable “The Hare and the Tortoise”. Urgency resulted in a weak knowledge-base behind the decisions, politicians deviating from normal planning procedures, unrealistic solutions, arena-shifting and problems of attention, which all slowed down the process and undermined its rationality.

The third and final lesson is that one should take care not to view inquiry commissions as “truth” commissions. Not all recommendations are founded on evidence-based policy-making. Since the organizational solution in this case was not thoroughly analyzed, the question remains whether a more decentralized network arrangement might be more effective than a large centralized and integrated emergency center (Moynihan 2008a, 2008b). Professionalized and concentrated coordination through co-location has been considered an effective crisis management innovation by some observers (Moynihan 2007). The NPERC aims for such coordination. Further research might tell us how well this can and does work in practice.

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