



POLITIET
OSLO POLITIDISTRIKT

Combating pickpocketing in downtown pubs

A collaboration between pubs and the Oslo Police

Sentrum Police Station
Oslo Police District
Norway



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Summary

Pickpocketing in the Norwegian capital of Oslo has increased rapidly and markedly since 2010, with a total of 17.989 registered offenses in the Oslo police district in 2012. The economic loss for victims of pickpocketing at such a level is substantial.

As a result, pickpocketing was selected for problem-oriented policing (POP) projects by the city central police station.

In total, six establishments were assigned "worst in class" status and targeted for POP based on high numbers of reported incidents and recurring mention in police logs. These were five pubs, clubs and bars, and one hotel.

One of the pubs that stood out in this group was "Andy's Pub". It serves as the case study of this report.

In 2011, there had been 95 reported pickpocketing incidents at Andy's Pub & Pianobar.

Analysis suggested that overcrowding, high levels of intoxication, suboptimal security, a lack of communication between employees and guests, as well as the absence of an attended cloakroom were key factors affecting the high level of pocket thefts.

On the district level the police in effect formulated a two-pronged response; one immediate and one long term. The immediate response, which is detailed here, was to intensify the POP approach at the station level, targeting individual locations identified by thorough scanning.

The crime prevention unit researched the management structure of the pub to identify decision makers, and the correct level at which to establish contact. The first meeting was held in December 2011.

The police was at this point able to draw on the knowledge acquired in the scanning and analysis phases to inform and educate in great detail.

Two sets of responses were decided on; one the responsibility of the police, the other the responsibility of the pub management.

Among the responses, information sheets designed as business cards (to make them non-intrusive, easy to carry, and more likely to be kept) were an example of a measure well received by both the pub management and the public.

Both sets of responses that were formulated for Andy's Pub were implemented.

The main impact measure was an immediate and persistent reduction in pocket thefts at the targeted locations.

District numbers increased steadily during the entire period of 2012, while reported pocket thefts dropped at the locations targeted for the POP approach (some more than others).

Andy's Pub had 95 reported pocket thefts in 2011, but only 40 pocket thefts in 2012.

Background and context

Oslo is the capital of Norway, with a population of around 600.000 people.

The Oslo Police District is made up of a number of separate sections and units. The district is divided into five sectors, each with a police station. The most centrally placed of these is Sentrum Police Station, which services an area that has within its borders the majority of the most popular hotels, pubs and bars in the capital.¹

This concentration results in a vibrant nightlife, but also brings with it a concentration of challenges. Drug-related crime, assault, robbery, rape, pickpocketing, violent bouncers, as well as financial crime are all problems the police have tried to approach systematically. Problem-oriented policing is therefore used as a framework and continuously developed as a method in the Oslo Police District.

The Oslo police regularly conduct district-wide scans and analyses in order to monitor how crime in the area changes.

¹ See appendix C

Scanning

Pickpocketing in the Norwegian capital of Oslo has increased rapidly and markedly since 2010.

Computerized crime data shows a staggering 45 % increase in registered offenses from 2010 to 2011. A further 19,4 % increase from 2011 to 2012 resulted in a total of 17.989 registered offenses in the Oslo police district in 2012.² This number of registered offenses rivals that of Berlin, a capital with approximately seven times the population of Oslo.

Pickpocketing has become the biggest crime category in the district measured by number of offenses, and accounted for 19,3 % of all registered crime in Oslo in 2012. 71,8 % of all registered pickpocketing offences in Norway in 2012 occurred in the Oslo police district.

The problem was first identified through standardized monthly scanning of major crime categories. These are carried out routinely at station and district level, and are reviewed continuously in order to manage all available policing resources effectively. The initial unit of analysis was the statistical crime category grand larceny, of which pickpocketing is a sub-category.

Around the same time, officers patrolling downtown areas began to apprehend increasing numbers of pickpockets. These pickpockets had in many cases initially been spotted by security or employees at different types of downtown establishments, who then contacted the police.

Increasing numbers of victims began approaching patrolling officers in the streets to report incidents. Security working the Oslo nightlife scene contacted patrols during their weekend night shifts, to report the apparent exacerbation of their own experiences.

In addition to their own analyses, the police were made aware of the problem through commercial interest organizations voicing their growing concerns directly to the city central police station. Hotels reported pickpockets operating in reception and dining areas.

Concurrent with the volume increase evident in the crime statistics, pickpocketing received heightened and sustained national media coverage, particularly when it came to offenses occurring in the capital.

² See appendix A

Pickpocketing was selected for POP projects by the city central police station as a result of the singularly rapid, sustained and massive increase in the number of offenses, the resulting public concern, and the effect on life in the capital, primarily in the city center. The number of offenses, in combination with the low clarification rate associated with this type of offense, negatively impacted the police's own performance tracking systems to the extent that it obscured positive developments for other crime types.

The aggregate economic loss for victims of pickpocketing at such a level is significant. If a quarter of the reported incidents in 2012 concerned the theft of a smart phone, the combined value of those stolen goods would be in excess of 2,3 million US dollars.³

The sheer volume of reported incidents points to a substantial crime ecosystem with pickpocketing at its center, where transport and trade of stolen cell phones occurs across borders.

The Sentrum police station criminal intelligence and crime analysis unit published a comprehensive problem analysis report on pickpocketing in Oslo in March 2012. Further analyses involving individual addresses were carried out by the station's crime prevention unit, based on that report.

The crime prevention unit was then tasked with tailoring a POP project targeting identified problem areas and addresses, and it in turn mobilized and combined efforts with the uniformed unit, and the criminal intelligence and crime analysis unit.

Initial scanning once the problem was identified confirmed that pickpockets as a rule seemed to target more expensive and newer model smart phones.

Pickpockets mostly operate in public spaces. Key places identified in the scanning phase were pubs, bars, restaurants, hotels, certain streets, and the public transportation network in the city center. Common to all was the problem of crowding, which pickpockets tend to exploit.

³ Supposing a mean value of 522 USD. An iPhone 5 retails for 903 USD from Apple Norway (09.05.2013).

Analysis

Initial analysis was conducted on reported crime data using proprietary database query software. Variables like crime type, street address and geolocation, police sector and sub-sector, stolen goods, date and time, were used to build an overview and identify where to drill deeper into data.

Statistics, in conjunction with observation and information received, pointed towards a new and significant segment of perpetrators who possessed specialized skillsets, and operated at a professional level. Before the marked increase in pickpocketing, perpetrators that were caught usually had a previous history with narcotics abuse; they were Norwegian citizens, and the crime would often appear opportunistic in nature.⁴ After the increase, most perpetrators that were taken into custody were not Norwegian citizens, appeared to pickpocket professionally, and did not exhibit the same connection to the established drug scene.

Objects targeted for theft by pickpockets were in most cases new smart phones, mostly Apple, Nokia, Samsung and Motorola brands. Other popular targets were wallets, often in combination with card fraud, and laptops.

A database consisting of the district operations center's running logs of police operations, patrol activity, emergency calls, and other calls from the public was also queried for the year 2011. This query helped identify problem addresses and verify the findings from crime statistics based on reported incidents.

The combined statistics and logs identified several pubs in the center of the city where there were many reported crimes, as well as recurring logs of patrols being called to collect pickpockets caught in the act by security. Patrol activity of this type, at these addresses, consistently occurred from around midnight to 03:30, Saturdays and Sundays.

In total, six establishments were targeted for POP based on high numbers of reported incidents and recurring mention in police logs. These were five pubs, clubs and bars, and one hotel. In addition the crime prevention unit helped survey the situation at seven other hotels that ended up not being targeted.

⁴ Oslo has a relatively high number of heavy drug users. The result is a noticable public presence of users and dealers in the downtown area. This drug community is disproportionally represented in both robbery and theft statistics.

One of the pubs that stood out in this group was “Andy’s Pub & Pianobar”, located inside a triangle described by City Hall, the parliament building, and the capital’s main street, with the second busiest public transport hub in the city close by. It serves as the specific case study of this report.

The pub is very popular, and capitalizes on its location. The premises are suitable for up to 200 guests, according to the government license to serve alcohol held by the establishment. The pub is required by law to have at least one security guard or doorman on staff.⁵

In 2011, there had been 95 reported pickpocketing incidents at Andy’s Pub & Pianobar. This level of crime qualified the establishment for specific targeting by the police in helping to reduce the problem.

The 95 crime reports were studied in detail, and revealed that crimes occurred mostly late nights on weekends. This corresponds to when crowding is most likely, and levels of intoxication are expected to be high. Reported incidents were unevenly distributed by month, with up to 20 cases in March 2011, and down to four in May. The monthly total was trending up the last quarter, ending on nine cases in December.

The reports detailed the modus operandi of the perpetrators. Most thefts were from handbags and jacket pockets, followed by objects left on tables, chairs, and the bar counter.

Almost all thefts had occurred inside the premises. Only a few incidents occurred in the street outside, or in the queue to get in. The pub had no wardrobe for guests to leave coats and jackets in.

Documented stolen goods were in nine out of ten cases Apple iPhones, or Samsung, Nokia and Sony Ericson cell phones. The remainder were stolen wallets and expensive jackets or coats. In the case of the garments, an ulterior motive might have been access to the contents in the pockets, again pointing to cell phones and wallets as the primary target.

In total, the 95 reported incidents from 2011 amounted to 450.000 NOK (77.700 USD) in stolen goods.

Only guests had been victimized in 2011. No employees had reported a theft. Slightly more women than men had been victimized (57 % to 43 %). The male victims were on average slightly older, with female victims from 23 to 32 years old, and male victims from 23 to 40 years old.

⁵ Evenings and nights only.

The few arrests that were made at this address in 2011 indicated that the pickpockets operated both individually and in groups of two to three people. The previously expected type of suspect – Norwegian citizen, drug addiction, established criminal record – was never encountered, and might possibly have had trouble blending in; a likely prerequisite for the identified modus operandi.

The pickpockets that were caught and arrested at Andy's Pub in 2011 were all foreign nationals.

Prior to police involvement, the pub had had no overall strategy to reduce thefts. There had been attempts at displaying self-made posters warning against pickpockets.

The analysis suggested several factors that were likely to contribute to the severity of the problem at Andy's Pub, as well as the other locations identified in the scanning phase. Specific to this case were the following:

1. Overcrowding. Did the pub admit more guests than their alcohol license allowed? If this was the case, the resulting crowding would provide optimal working conditions for pickpockets.
2. Intoxication. Did employees continue to serve alcohol to already intoxicated guests? This could be an intended, established practice at the location, or it could be the unintended result of a lack of education of the employees.
3. Security. The establishment only had one doorman or security guard. This seemed insufficient considering the 200-guest limit imposed on the pub.
4. Communication. Did the employees have a shared understanding of the problem, that would allow them to implement effective counter-measures? Did they have a communication strategy with regards to their customers, to inform of the risk and thereby prevent theft?
5. Coat check. The pub did not appear to have an attended cloakroom.

The identified hot times for offences corresponded to when crowding was most likely, and levels of intoxication were expected to be high.

Response

On the district level the police in effect formulated a two-pronged response; one immediate and one long term. The immediate response, which is detailed here, was to intensify the POP approach at the station level, targeting individual locations identified by thorough scanning.

The long term strategy to answer the district-wide increase in offenses consisted of establishing a specialized unit that would simultaneously target pickpocketing at the operational, tactical and strategic level; meaning surveillance/apprehension, investigation/prosecution, and crime analysis/intelligence-led policing. This long term, over-arching POP project took by design longer to implement, and is still under evaluation.

The crime prevention unit was very aware of how important it is to establish good communications and a productive relationship with the problem owner, in this case the management of Andy's Pub. The first meeting is crucial, and demands solid preparation.

The crime prevention unit researched the management structure of the pub to identify decision makers, and the correct level at which to establish contact; key variables like what resources were available to them, which private contractor provided their security, and the pub's history. The research also incorporated an analysis of other types of crime in the area.

On the basis of this information the crime prevention unit established contact with the owner of the pub in December 2011. The owner was given a quick overview of the situation and was informed that the police were concerned. The owner was aware that pickpocketing did occur at the pub, but was surprised at the number of incidents the police could document. A first meeting was agreed upon, and held the following week.

Present at the first meeting was the owner of the pub, the manager, the person responsible for the bar and the bartenders, and the manager of the security contractor hired by the owner.

The police was at this point able to draw on the knowledge acquired in the scanning and analysis phases to inform and educate in great detail. A positive, solution-oriented and trustful approach ensured that the message was very well received, and a basis for effective cooperation was secured. This basis consisted in part of developing an awareness of responsibility and accountability on the part of the pub management, and communicating that the police was accountable and responsible as well. Establishing this common awareness of shared accountability was the main goal of the first meeting.

Key parts of this first meeting were as follows:

- Providing a clear picture of the situation, including the nature and scope of the thefts
- Underlining the pub's responsibility towards their guests
- Creating an understanding of the fact that the problem can persist or escalate without proper counter-measures
- Creating an understanding of the fact that proper counter-measures can effectively reduce or even eliminate the problem, without creating false hopes
- Assuring the management that the police will provide continued support and guidance throughout the process
- Letting the problem owner on their own suggest initiatives and proposed actions. This type of involvement is very effective in strengthening the cooperation and increasing the likelihood that good counter-measures will be implemented and receive the proper follow-up. The problem owner is more likely to feel ownership of the process, and satisfaction when it pays off.

In addition, the crime prevention unit wished to establish a shared enthusiasm for the collaborative effort and the possibilities therein, and consciously attempted to convey the structured and goal-oriented framework of their approach.

Having identified, through analysis, the core factors that were expected to directly impact the level of crime, the crime prevention unit formulated a set of responses, divided into two categories. One category was to be implemented by the problem owner. The other comprised the responsibilities of the police. Together these actions were expected to be the most effective response.

The following set of responses were proposed to the pub management:

- Controlling the number of guests – a strategy to limit crowding
- Controlling intoxication levels – reviewing relevant laws and regulations
- Establishing an attended cloakroom – leading to target hardening and target deprivation

- Increasing security from one doorman to a team of two or three
- Reviewing the role of security in informing the guests of the presence of pickpockets, focusing on the queue in the evenings on weekends
- Training in spotting perpetrators
- Instructing management in holding regular staff meetings

The following set of responses were presented as the responsibility of the police:

- Providing a permanent contact for the continued handling of the problem (an officer of the crime prevention unit)
- Providing a permanent contact from the uniformed unit, with a schedule for regular visits to the pub
- Responsibility for coordinating the collaboration and convene meetings
- Providing a monthly scanning of reported thefts and keeping the pub management informed
- Educating the employees in how to spot possible perpetrators and how they prefer to work, in order to prevent theft
- Designing and providing information sheets for security to hand out to guests in the queue outside the pub⁶

The information sheets were designed as business cards, to make them non-intrusive, easy to carry, and likely to be kept close to a person's valuables - in a wallet or card holder, together with credit and debit cards.

The format was also meant to increase the chance of the guest keeping it for a longer period of time, increasing the chance the person would look at it again and be reminded of the risk.

The message was designed to be simple, honest, informative and trust-inspiring. The front of the card had the police logo and the following text:

"Look after your belongings! Unfortunately, we are troubled with pocket theft. We are cooperating with the police."

⁶ See appendix B

The back of the card displayed contact information for the Oslo police, as well as their internet address together with the following text:

“Remember! You can report a pocket theft online.”

Security staff were instructed in how to hand the cards out most effectively. Instead of passively handing them out at the entrance, they were encouraged to market the cards actively up and down the queue outside the pub. When addressing a party of guests arriving together, not all of them were to be given a card. This strategy was intended to help create curiosity and discussion while the guests were waiting to get in. Once inside it was expected that it would become more difficult to reach the guests with this particular message.

Both security staff and guests gave positive feedback on this measure. The cards became very popular.

The two sets of responses were welcomed by the management and owner of Andy’s Pub. They quickly saw the connection between the responses and the problem at hand, and engaged in a creative and productive discussion with the crime prevention unit on how best to implement them.

The most important resources available to the police at this stage of the process were the owner, manager and other employees. Their willingness to accept responsibility and take action resulted in a continued effort throughout 2012. In addition, the police provided two permanent contacts; one from the crime prevention unit and one from the uniformed unit, who were able to follow up on the process at the strategic as well as the tactical level.

No financial resources were earmarked for the project.

Possible displacement effects were not considered in detail. With limited resources, the chosen approach was to work with the identified establishments on account of their “worst in class” status evidenced through crime statistics. Periodic monitoring was expected to pick up any displacement effect large enough to warrant a change in the response, with the caveat that the level of crime city-wide was very high and expected to keep rising. Displacement would have to be very concentrated to be noticeable. It was considered more likely that if displacement occurred, it would be scattered and dispersed in nature.

Assessment

All the establishments that were identified received the support and guidance detailed in the case of Andy's pub, with minor changes according to their peculiarities.

Both sets of responses that were formulated for Andy's Pub were implemented. The pub established an attended cloakroom in January 2011 as a paid service in the evenings and at nights on weekends. Responses that required periodic activity were implemented continuously during 2012.

Raising awareness among pub owners, and establishing methods of collaboration based on shared accountability and responsibility, was a goal in itself. In all but one case the evaluation has been positive in this regard. Collaborative efforts between police and businesses can be challenging, especially when the business feels that their income is threatened by the suggested responses.

The primary response goal, however, was an immediate and persistent reduction in pocket thefts at the specific locations. This also served as the main impact measure.

As exemplified by the case of Andy's Pub, the police and pubs succeeded in reducing the amount of pocket thefts in establishments identified during scanning as the most worthy of concern. While the reduction was not immediate, it was substantial.

The most important indicator turned out to be the context of the crime on the macro level. District numbers increased steadily during the entire period of 2012, while reported pocket thefts dropped at the locations targeted for the POP approach (some more than others).

The implemented measures were not successful in eliminating the problem, but it is highly likely, given the well-documented crime-specific context, that without them the level of crime at these establishments would have either stayed "worst in class", or would have become even more aggravated. Instead, as demonstrated by the case of Andy's Pub, the number of incidents was more than halved.

Andy's Pub had 95 reported pocket thefts in 2011, but only 40 reported pocket thefts in 2012.

It is important to consider that the implemented responses were likely to heighten awareness among the guests that frequented the establishments, as well as reduce the number of incidents. This in turn

might have made it more likely that individual pocket thefts at these places were reported as crimes, and therefore entered the statistics and subsequent periodic monitoring. Data quality was for this reason expected to rise over time, and could possibly skew the results. In the end we were not able to document such an effect.

Assisting impact measures was comprised of feedback given at the collaboration meetings and reports from the uniformed unit's visits to the pub.

The crime prevention unit noted that the employees as well as security at Andy's Pub became more skilled at spotting potential perpetrators and situations during 2012. In addition, the level of control at the door was improved with regards to intoxicated guests attempting to gain entry.

The response is expected to require continued monitoring and a continued effort.

Agency and officer information

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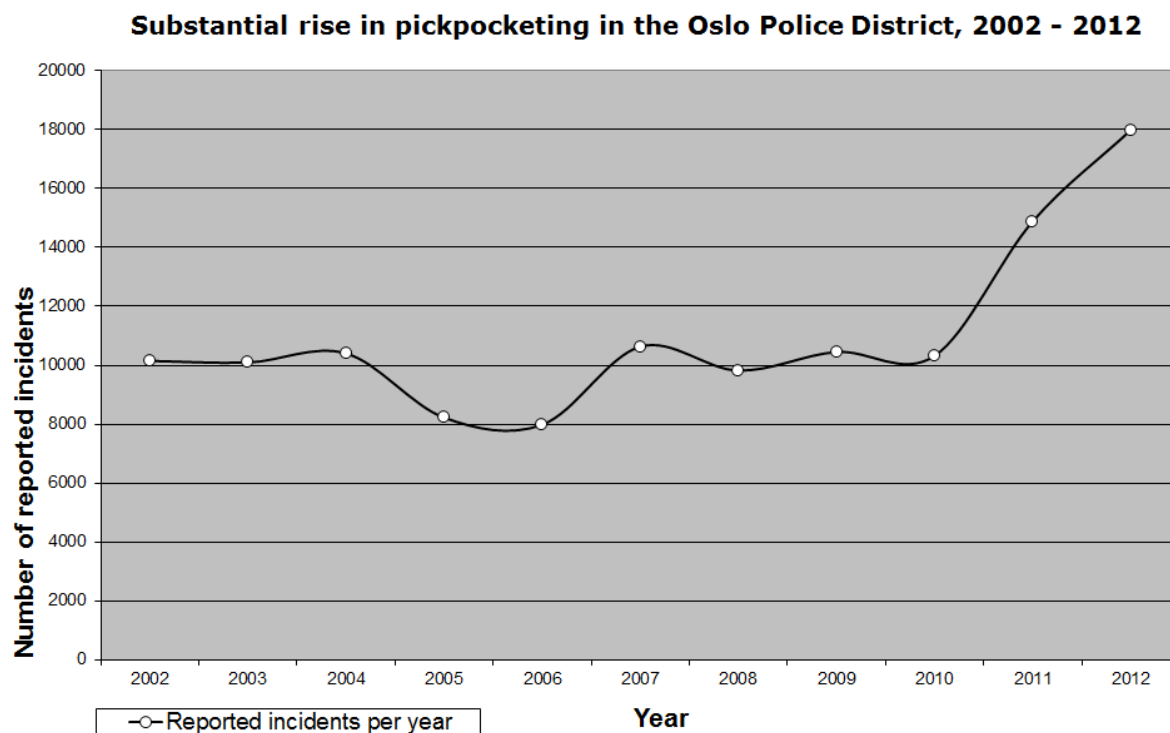
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Appendix A – Statistics

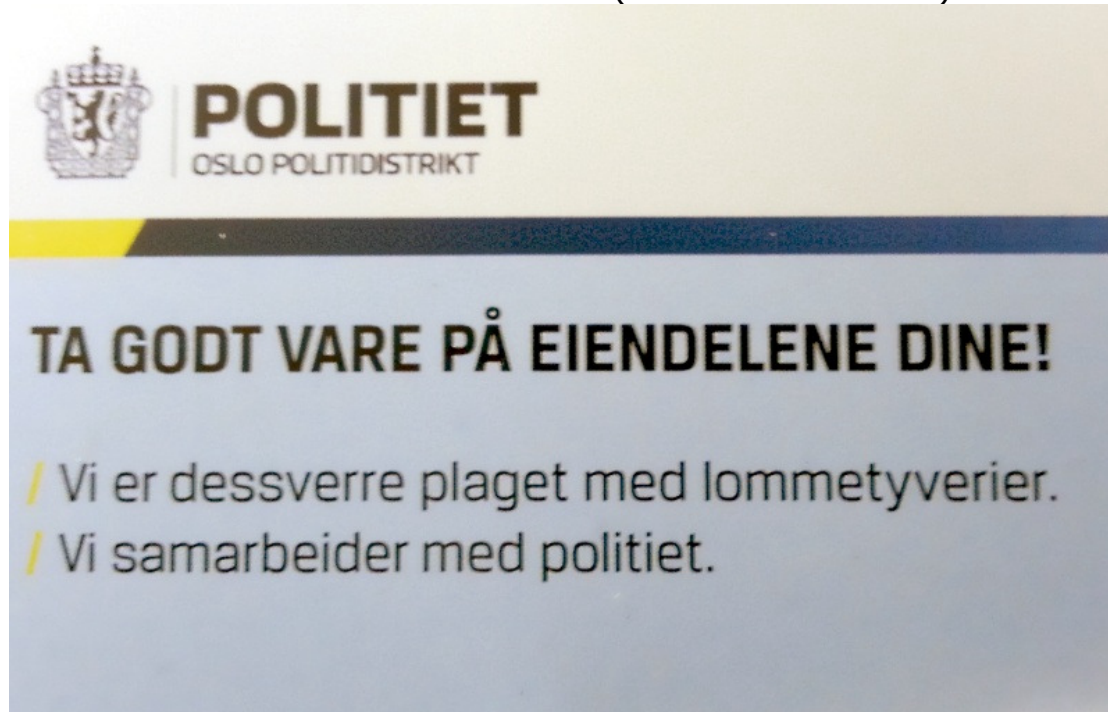


Reported pocket thefts at Andy's Pub by month

Month	2011	2012
January	10	7
February	10	7
March	20	7
April	8	2
May	4	1
June	6	7
July	5	1
August	5	0
September	5	2
October	7	1
November	6	4
December	9	1
Sum	95	40

Appendix B – Information sheet

Pocket theft information sheet: front (business card sized)



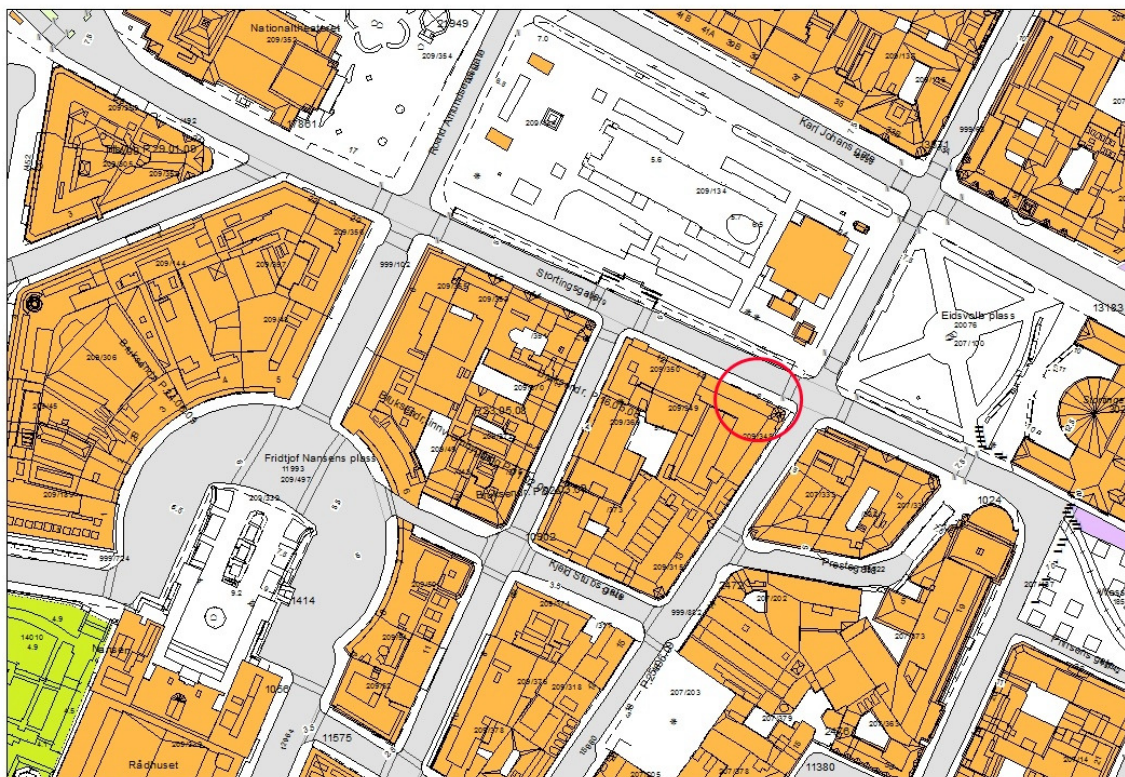
"Look after your belongings! Unfortunately, we are troubled with pocket theft. We are cooperating with the police."

Pocket theft information sheet: back (business card sized)



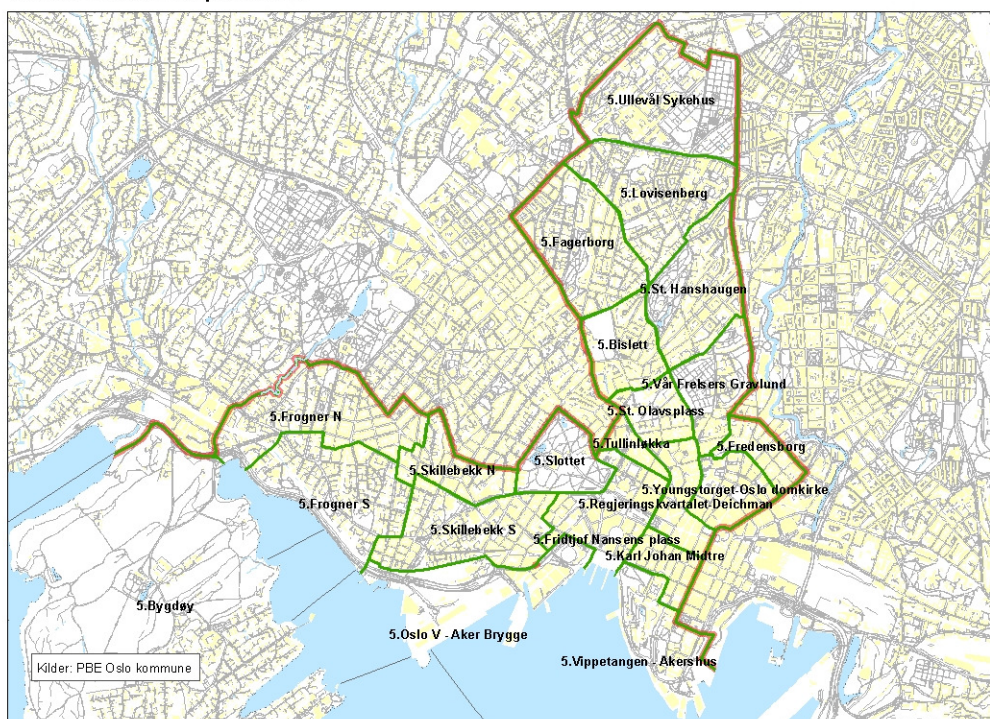
Displays contact information for the Oslo police, and the words "Remember! You can report a pocket theft online."

Appendix C - Maps



Andy's Pub & Pianobar, Stortingsgata 8, 0161 Oslo

Sentrum krets med politisoner



Sentrum police sector, Oslo