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FROM CRITICAL OUTSIDERS TO INTEGRATION? REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORDIC POLICE RESEARCH

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Abstract English

A decade ago, the question of the future of Nordic police research was raised by a handful of scholars (Granér & Kronkvist, 2015). Their perspectives on future developments varied somewhat and they discussed both possibilities and challenges. The main themes raised proved to be academic freedom and whether this affected the quality of research; topics covered or missed by research; research methods used; the domination of Norwegian and Swedish research and finally the lack of comparative Nordic studies.

This article considers, based on the themes above, the state of Nordic police research in 2025. The main data for this is based on a manual review of studies of policing in three Nordic journals. These journals are the Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing (2014–2025), Nordisk tidsskrift for kriminalvidenskab (2015–2025) and the Nordic Journal of Criminology (2015–2025).

The primary findings of this article are that there has been a substantial growth in research. However, Denmark remains the odd one out in Scandinavia with little research undertaken in this area. Additionally, a significant part of the growth achieved outside of Denmark is linked to the institutions of police education and the police system (insiders). Earlier, a researcher with a police background was very unusual; today it is more common. It might then be asked how this affects the research. In 2025 police research is thematically much more diverse than a decade earlier. However, comparative studies in the Nordic countries are still conspicuously absent.

Keywords: police research; Nordic countries; police science

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Sammanfattning

För ett decennium sedan väckte ett antal forskare frågan om den nordiska polisforskningens framtid (Granér & Kronkvist, 2015). Deras perspektiv på den framtida utvecklingen skilde sig delvis åt, och de diskuterade både möjligheter och utmaningar. De huvudsakliga teman som lyftes fram var akademisk frihet och frågan om hur denna påverkar forskningens kvalitet, vilka ämnen som studeras respektive förbises, vilka forskningsmetoder som används, den norska och svenska forskningens dominans samt bristen på jämförande nordiska studier.

Med utgångspunkt i dessa teman undersöker artikeln den nordiska polisforskningens situation år 2025. Det huvudsakliga empiriska underlaget bygger på en manuell genomgång av studier om polis och polisiärt arbete publicerade i tre nordiska tidskrifter: *Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing* (2014–2025), *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab* (2015–2025) och *Nordic Journal of Criminology* (2015–2025).

Artikelns huvudsakliga resultat visar att polisforskningen har vuxit avsevärt. Danmark utgör dock fortfarande ett undantag i Skandinavien, med relativt begränsad forskning inom området. En betydande del av den tillväxt som skett utanför Danmark är dessutom knuten till polisutbildningsinstitutioner och polisorganisationen, det vill säga forskning som bedrivs av personer med anknytning till polisverksamheten (*insiders*). Tidigare var forskare med polisiär bakgrund mycket ovanliga, medan detta i dag är betydligt vanligare. Detta väcker i sin tur frågan om hur denna utveckling påverkar forskningen.

År 2025 är polisforskningen tematiskt betydligt mer varierad än den var ett decennium tidigare. Jämförande studier mellan de nordiska länderna är dock fortfarande påfallande få.

Nyckelord: polisforskning; Norden; polisvetenskap

Introduction

In 2014 the fifth Nordic Police Research Conference was held in Växjö in Sweden. The theme of the conference was The Past, the Present and the Future of Police Research (Granér & Kronkvist, 2015). Founding fathers of modern police research such as David and Maurice Punch were invited as keynote speakers[1]. Bayley and Punch presented their thoughts on the developments and limits of police research.

[1] Modern police research developed from the 1960s on. In the English-speaking world, a handful of researchers from different fields of study such as Egon Bittner, Clifford Shearing, Peter Manning, Jerome Skolnick, Robert Reiner, Carl Klockars, David Bayley (1985, 1994) and Maurice Punch (1979, 2011) are among the most cited and influential.

Lars Holmberg and Paul Larsson gave talks on the same topic from a Nordic perspective. The topic had previously been examined by other Nordic researchers in their biographies of Nordic police research (Koch, 1982; Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011).

The year 2014 can be regarded as a watershed in Nordic police research. It can be argued that Nordic police research had reached a point where it had developed into a field in its own right, at least in Norway and Sweden. The volume and quality of the work and the thematic diversity of police research was such that it would no longer be labelled a peculiar subdivision of criminology or political science, but rather as a subject in its own right. Two indicators of this change are the Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing and the first Scandinavian textbook in police science "Innføring i politivitenskap" (Larsson et.al., 2014) both dating from 2014.

This article examines developments in police research, taking as a starting point the main arguments of Holmberg (2015), Punch (2015), Valland (2011) and Larsson (2015). For this review, Brown's (1996) typology of police researchers, as presented by Davies (2016), will be used to better understand some central developments. The primary question is whether police research can be trusted when that research is moving towards a situation where insiders in the police are themselves becoming central to the research. This raises questions concerning the objectivity and quality of research. The typology represents a more nuanced approach to the old question of freedom of research and who owns and has responsibility for it[2].

These developments are illustrated by a number of different approaches. All issues of the Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing from 2014 onwards were reviewed manually. All issues of the Nordic Journal of Criminology and Nordisk tidsskrift for kriminalvidenskab from the last decade were also reviewed manually to identify research on policing. This approach has clear methodological limitations, but it provides descriptive data concerning who has published in these three journals, along with their subject matter and methodology. It also shows who does and does not publish in the same outlets, but who will publish either in more internationally oriented journals or in journals covering other fields of research, for example, purely legal journals, or pedagogic, psychological, historical or practically oriented journals. Before turning to these findings, however, it is useful to revisit the reflections offered by scholars in 2015.

The state of police research

Cecilie Høigård (2005) documented in her bibliography of Nordic police research that there had been a major increase in this since the 1990s. For the period 1992-2004 she listed 215 publications[3]. Norwegian and Swedish research dominated in numbers while Finnish and Icelandic publications often fell outside the subject area because of language barriers. The report is best known for its discussion of differences between university and governmental research[4]. "Governmental research is characterized by a top-down

[2] Or if it is governmental research or "free" university research (see below).

[3] She defined police research somewhat narrowly compared to later bibliographies. The definition was mostly criminological or sociological. Høigård and Valland's numbers cannot be compared with mine since their scope was much wider in what to include.

[4] She named it universitetsforskning og myndighetsforskning.

and a management perspective. The research should be useful in guiding the police's working methods and priorities." (Høigård, 2005, p. 105) University research, on the other hand, was described as both freer, more critical and not directed by requirements of its immediate utility. For many, this distinction was not merely descriptive but normative, as university research was often assumed to be of higher scientific quality and less constrained by organisational interests.

Tatanya Valland (2011) provided a follow-up bibliography of Nordic police research covering the period 2004–2009. Again, Norwegian and Swedish research proved to be dominant. Valland identified some 172 scientific works in police research in the five-year period. This is a clear growth in output, but Høigård and Valland used somewhat different definitions of what constitutes police research and what can be included. Valland used the definitions of Granér and Larsson (2008) and Gundhus, Larsson and Myhrer (2007). Valland pointed to the limitations of dividing the research into two clear categories of governmental and university research and that these two ideal types are often blurred.

Maurice Punch (2015) briefly describes the history of police research in the English-speaking world, from the 1960s to its more institutionalised form in the early years of the 21st century. There are similarities and differences between the international and the Nordic developments in police research. The first early police research in the Nordic countries in the 60's and 1970s does not appear to have been a product of radical criminology, but rather a result of interest from researchers interested in the police as a social institution (Støkken, 1974). Professors of criminal law such as Johs Andenæs and Anders Brattholm, as well as police chiefs and bureaucrats such as Elg Elgesem[5], recognised a need for research on the police (Halvorsen, 2021; Larsson & Granér 2008). Much of the research undertaken in Norway at the Institute of Criminology and Penal Law in Oslo is summed up in the book "Politiet i det norske samfunn" (1974) with a foreword by Nils Christie. The radical phase of police studies comes somewhat later, from the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, much of it concentrating on the use of force, the political aspects of policing and police violence. This is very much in line with what Reiner (2010) describes in his account of the development of police research.

Based on his short historical summary, Punch looks ahead. His advice to police researchers is summed up in his statement: "Look upwards (away from ground floor), outwards (partnerships) and abroad (comparative)." (Punch, 2015, p. 26) He also emphasises closeness to the field and the value of comparative and ethnographic research. Much of Punch's own work on the police has consisted of comparative ethnographic studies in the UK and the Netherlands. For Punch the most central questions in relation to research are: "Who does what research in which societies and on what topics and with what impact" (Punch, 2015, p. 26).

Lars Holmberg (2014; 2015) describes challenges in Nordic police research. He points to restrictions that limit the opportunities to conduct police research. Opportunities for participant observation, or

[5] In Norway. The development in other Nordic countries appears to have been somewhat similar. This was the time when criminal and penal law was a moving force and professors (and Ministers of Justice) like Inkeri Antilla in Finland, Johs Andenæs in Norway and Knut Waaben in Denmark were crucial for the developments in criminal policy. There was a belief in research and science as central to the developments in penal and criminal law. Much of the activity on a Nordic level was channelled through Nordisk samarbeidsråd for kriminologi, established in 1962.

"backseat research",[6] have in fact been restricted in Denmark and Norway. Many aspects of policing have been closed to research for different reasons. There are ethical restrictions concerning studies of police work in sensitive fields, while studies of covert policing are rarely open for study in order to protect officers, informers and limit general knowledge about covert activity (Larsson, 2014; Franzén, 2024). Research might not be encouraged because police managers do not want to shed light on negative effects of police work or recent innovations, like police reforms (Holmberg, 2015).

Holmberg points to a growing number of studies concerned with *what works* and with measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. It is presented as "useful" data, in contrast to critical studies that question the wider implications and unintended effects of policing. Police research that does not measure what works and is "outside the box" will often be seen as of little relevance and consequently be ignored. Nevertheless, the number of reports, analyses, evaluations and official documents on policing and the police organisation has grown in the period (Gundhus & Larsson, 2025). Official reports in relation to police reforms, questions of arming the police, new developments and major incidents are now the norm. One might ask what impact police research may have had on these reports? There are reports that have a solid foundation of police research, as the NOU on the use of arms (NOU 2017:9) and the police as a learning organisation (NOU 2009:12), while most noteworthy the police analysis (NOU 2013:9) and the report on the 22 July Commission (NOU 2012:14) which exhibited a limited input of police research. Instead, it is in fact quite common to use accounting firms such as KPMG[7] or official accountants to carry out the work of fact production. This development towards evidence and accountancy in the police has been highlighted by many researchers (Punch, 2011; Terpstra, et.al., 2019; Dahl et.al., 2022). Crime science, broken windows theory and Problem-Oriented Policing promised a basis built on hard evidence to improve police efficiency[8], particularly in the field of crime prevention.

Holmberg also notes that the distinction between government and university research is now often blurred and that university research today is frequently tied to grants and funding. Researchers find themselves in hard competition for grants. This makes university research less free, while there is often academic freedom in the police system[9]. Holmberg laments the fact that there are too few comparative studies, or researchers from one country doing research in another. The potential value of comparative studies in the Nordic countries is high: the countries share cultural and legal similarities and differences, and the language barriers are relatively low.

Larsson (2015) raises the question of what has been covered by research and what has been forgotten. There had been a growth in police research, but it was uneven. Some areas of policing were well covered while others needed more attention. Well-covered topics included "backseat" research, crime

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[6] Back seat research is a phrase often used to describe police researchers doing participant observations of patrolling police. This often takes the form of "riding with the police". Well-known Nordic examples are the research of Finstad (2000), Sollund (2007) and Granér (2004). See also Dahl and Tjora (2023) on methodological problems of "shotgun riding".

[7] KPMG is one of the largest accounting and consulting firms in the world. KPMG is short for Klynveld, Peat, Marwick og Goerdeler.

[8] Crime science is an interdisciplinary field that emphasises the criminal event and the environment to reduce opportunities for offending. It builds on situational crime prevention, environmental criminology and evidence-based policing. Brottsförebyggande rådet, BRÅ in Sweden can be seen as a representative for evidence-based research. See Felson (1998), Goldstein (1990), Clarke (1997), Hirsch, Garland and Wakefield (2000).

[9] We are all, both insiders and outsiders, in the university system, applying for the same grants.

prevention[10], recruitment, diversity and *the co*mposition of the police, as well as police interviewing and interrogation (Rachlew, 2009; Fahsing & Rachlew, 2009). In 2015 areas not sufficiently addressed included: police management, civilian and "the office police", police investigation as a field, high policing and the use of covert methods, policing of white-collar and organised crime; police, the media and the politics of the police; comparative studies, and policing by actors other than the police.

To sum up the different contributions:

All the authors point to a growth in police research since the 1990s. The most substantial growth has been in connection with the police organisation and police academies. All warn of uncritical "governmental" police research and underline the value of free studies that problematise the role of the police in society. At the same time, Valland and Holmberg problematise the assumption that university research is necessarily more critical and free, while insider research is necessarily uncritical and censored (see above). The question of what the movement towards more research being conducted by insiders does to the trust in police research will be considered below (Davies, 2016).

Punch and Holmberg agree on several issues. Both underline the importance of qualitative research and are worried about the development towards tighter control over researchers' access in many fields of policing. Access has become more difficult, and tighter controls are exercised over what can be published[11]. They both point to the value of comparative studies but also note that such studies are rarely undertaken.

Valland, Holmberg and Larsson document that Norway and Sweden dominate the field of police research. Finnish and Icelandic research have often been more oriented towards European than Nordic journals since these often published in Scandinavian languages. Since they had to write in English, except a small Swedish-speaking Finnish minority, European journals could be more attractive. The limited Danish police research seems to be a result of a lack of research institutions, grants and an overall more negative stance to open police research (Diederichsen, 2017; Holmberg 2015)[12]. One important factor behind the growth of police research, at least in Norway and Sweden, is the ideal of knowledge- or evidence-based policing and the general academic drift as seen in other professions (Halvorsen, 2021).

Insiders or outsiders?

Davies (2016), in his article "To what extent can we trust police research?" raises the questions of who does the research, under what conditions, and how this affects police research. He takes Brown's (1996) typology of police researchers as a starting point.

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[10] At that time there was a strong belief in Problem-Oriented Policing and situational crime theory in the Nordic countries resulting in research. The BRÅ publications on crime prevention are many, in Norway at the Police University College Knutsson (2006) was active in the field.

[11] We have had a few cases where research has been withheld from open publication primarily by the Police directorate at the Norwegian Police University College, often MA theses. There is often a sound reason for this, that the information is not public or that facts or persons in sensitive cases can be recognised.

[12] We can also see this in the "brain drain" of Danish researchers to other Nordic countries.

Davies' description of the development of police research echoes the picture presented by (2015), Punch (2015) and Reiner (2010). The 1960s and 1970s were dominated by "free" researchers, often from the social sciences, at universities with no or limited affiliation to the police. Their interest in the police often started because of an interest in the study of social control, the use of power, the practice of discretion or social work, all depending on their academic background. They can be labelled as civilian outsiders (or outsider outsiders, see below). Since the 1990s there has been a steady growth of researchers employed in the police system (inside outsiders). Since the turn of the millennium the number of police officers with a master's degree or a PhD has grown, many of them doing research on the police while still in the police. They can be labelled insider insiders. The last of the four types comprises researchers with a police background doing research in a civilian institution, such as a university.

Table 1: Typology of police researchers (Brown 1996)

		Institution	
		Police	**Civilian**
Researcher	Police	Insider insider	Outsider insider
	civilian	Insider outsider	Outsider outsider

A substantial part of the growth in police research since the turn of the century has occurred within police institutions, clearly seen in the police academies, by both civilian researchers and researchers with a background in policing, insider insiders and inside outsiders. Davies' main question is *whether* and *how* this affects research outcomes. Does the research have the same scientific quality as research undertaken by outsiders at universities? Or is it coloured and/or biased by the police system? Does this affiliation endanger or erode public trust in police research? Such questions are especially relevant since a not insignificant part of police research deals with topics such as police use of their powers, handling of crises and dangerous situations, and miscarriages of justice.

Davies describes the new era of police research as one of collaboration between insiders and outsiders in multiple ways. The Nordic countries are identified as good examples of this mixing. The boundaries between 'insider insiders' and 'outsider outsiders' are blurred. There are many examples of this. One is the requirement that police work is evidence based, as is the ideal in Norway, or knowledge-informed policing[13] (Lungaard et.al., 2022). The ideal of intelligence-led policing and the reliance on police analyses have grown significantly in the last decades (Gundhus & Larsson 2025). Researchers from outside institutions collaborate with police personnel in the production of reports, analyses, evaluations and research. The number of reports and papers covering different aspects of policing is now of such a size that it is difficult for interested readers to keep abreast of. Police institutions now have close ties to universities and research institutions. At the same time both outsider outsiders and insiders are required

[13] "These ideas are partly reflected in the Norwegian police, but in the more moderate version of knowledge-based policing (…). There, it is emphasized that measures should be implemented based on systematic collection and analysis of knowledge (NOU 2009: 12:185)." (Lungaard et.al., 2022, p. 112)

to apply for grants and money from the same institutions. Davies' model provides a more nuanced starting point for analysing the state of police research in 2026 than the old dichotomy of university and governmental research.

Publications in Nordic journals

The Nordic journals: Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing (NJSP), Nordic Journal in Criminology (NJC) and Nordisk tidsskrift for kriminalvidenskab (Ntfk) have been interrogated to get some idea of who publishes and on what themes. These journals have a history of publishing police research. Ntfk is the oldest and has been in print for more than 100 years. It has traditionally been a Nordic journal covering the penal system, dominated by penal law and representatives working in the courts, police, prison system and researchers in this field. NJC is a journal affiliated with the Nordic Research Council for Criminology (NSfK). It is aimed primarily at criminological research and has been in existence since 2000. NJSP is a Nordic journal for research on policing; its first volume was published in 2014. The journals, as we will see, cover different aspects of police research, by researchers with diverse academic and professional backgrounds.

The journals were reviewed manually to identify research on policing[14]. This means that articles covering policing conducted by other actors, such as environmental authorities or private security companies, were also included, but few such articles were found. All issues of NJSP were reviewed (2014–2025). For NJC and Ntfk, the review covered the decade 2015–2025.

A total of 147 articles on policing were identified in the three journals: 104 in NJSP, 23 in NJC, and 20 in Ntfk.

Table 2. Nordic journals and nationality of researchers[15]

	Norway	**Sweden**	**Denmark**	**Finland**	**Island**	**Articles**
Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing (NJSP)	51	31	12	5	-	104*

[14] Whether this constitutes police science, and how police science should be defined, is beyond the scope of this article. I deliberately use the term studies of policing. The term police science is much debated and is in most instances not a term generally preferred by scholars (Diderichsen, 2017, Larsson et.al., 2025).

[15] There are three publications by British academics in NJSP and two international. 'There is one article co-authored by a Finnish and a Norwegian researcher in NJC, and one co-authored by a Danish and a Scottish researcher.

Nordic Journal of Criminology (NJC)	3’	7	5	3’	3	20
Nordisk tidsskrift for kriminalvidenskab (Ntfk)	12	5	5	1	-	23
Total	66	43	22	9	3	147

Norway and Sweden still dominate the output. Sixty-six of the articles were classified as Norwegian, corresponding to 45%. Norway dominates the NJSP but has few publications in the NJC. The Swedish contribution comprises 43 articles, corresponding to 29%. The Danish contribution comprises 22 articles, corresponding to 15%. Finnish researchers contributed nine articles, and of these five were in NJSP. There are three articles from Iceland, all in NJC. There are three articles written by scholars from the UK, and one that is a Nordic collaboration. Taking population and number of police students into account, Sweden’s publication rate is comparable to Denmark’s16.

Nearly all articles are based on studies conducted in the authors’ own countries. Holmberg (2015) and Punch (2015) both underlined the importance of comparative studies. One is written by Norwegian and Finnish authors about corruption built on Nordic cases (Kääriäinen et.al., 2016). Eight of the contributions can be described as having an international perspective; these are mainly theoretical works. This suggests that Holmberg and Punch’s recommendation has had limited impact.

A decade ago, Larsson (2015) described a situation of some topics being well covered while others were “forgotten”. The list in 2025 is somewhat similar, with some exceptions. Back seat studies, typically of patrolling police, and cultural studies are not that common. One obvious reason for this is the restrictions on police research that make such studies harder to undertake. Police organisations have also raised strong complaints about having to contribute to a multitude of research questions and filling in numerous (often comprehensive) questionnaires17. There are still many projects on crime prevention, but they do not have the same dominating position today and the perspectives have changed from Problem-Oriented Policing and situational crime prevention towards programmes, individual prevention (Magnusson 2023) and cooperation between authorities (Kankaanranta et.al., 2023). These developments might be a reflection of changing police practices and new priorities in policing (Terpstra et.al., 2019).

On the positive side, there is considerable variation and thematic breadth which covers many different aspects of policing. The articles demonstrate a wide range of topics and perspectives. There are, for example, 18 studies of police students in NJSP alone, covering topics like strength, motivation (Risan et.al., 2022), student backgrounds, different forms of firearms training and training using modern simulation equipment. Issue 1/2022 of NJSP is a special issue on police education. Another theme well

[16] If we look at publications according to population Sweden is comparable to Denmark, since Norway and Finland have approximately 5 million inhabitants, Denmark 6 while Sweden is the double, 10.6 million. Island is 395 000. Sweden has by far the greatest number of new police students at approximately 1000 a year.

[17] Especially the Oslo police, but also other forces, have reported “research fatigue”.

covered is policing of domestic violence (Aas, 2020), also with a special issue on policing intimate partner violence (NJSP 2025:2).

The broad range of articles on policing covers investigation and interrogation, police and minorities, digitalisation and police work, police reform, police and arms, conflict resolution, police health, prevention of radicalisation, research methods, policing and gender, LGBTQI and hate crime and police and ethnicity. The previous decade has seen important research on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Publications on these issues are to a limited degree published in the three journals[18].

There is limited research on investigation and policing carried out by actors other than the police. The studies of the police are still rather traditional in focusing on patrol work or management. There is limited research published in the journals on policing organised crime, white-collar crime, gangs or environmental crimes (Larsson, 2020; 2022). This is likely to change in the years to come as gang-related crime, criminal networks and organised crime are now high on the list of priorities in all Nordic countries.

The research methods used can inform us about the type of research that has been conducted. Governmental studies and evaluations are often characterised as quantitatively oriented, typically quantitative studies of effects and developments. Of the published articles, 96 of the 147 are qualitative studies, 29 are quantitative, six are mixed methods, five use historical methods, and three are from the field of law. A number of the quantitative studies relate to studies of students (Löfgren and Hansson 2022) and recruitment or analysis of data produced by the police. The domination of qualitative studies in the field of Nordic police studies has been pointed out earlier and can be best seen as a reflection of the background of the researchers and a history reflecting the "classic" studies in the field (Fekjær 2018; Punch 2015; Holmberg 2015; Finstad 2000).

Table 3. Method[19]

[18] In Norway the centre C-REX has been central in research in the field, much of it police-related.

[19] This categorisation is somewhat rough. Some of the studies are difficult to categorise; some of the quantitative studies are experiments. Some qualitative studies are theoretical studies or based on literature and language analysis.

Main method	Number	Percent
Qualitative	96	69.1
Quantitative	29	20.9
Mixed methods	6	4.3
Juris prudence	3	2.2
Historical method	5	3.6
Total	139	100

The background of the authors has not been checked systematically. But based on my knowledge of the authors[20] some features seem clear. Some of the authors have a background as police officers before later turning to academia, they are insider insiders. They remain a minority in the corpus in the Nordic countries. However, NJSP is predominantly an insider journal, but mainly for outsider insiders, that is, researchers in the police with a university background. They are also predominantly researchers from the police education system. The other two journals have a higher number of outsider outsiders. This is reflected in the perspectives and themes researched. Since these journals are in the field of criminology and criminalistics (more open), this would explain some of the differences.

This manual review has important limitations. First, the Finns are clearly underrepresented compared to the volume of police research done. Finns publish in Finnish, but they also publish more in international journals. So, the goal of getting the Finns to publish more in the NJSP by changing the language of the journal to English in 2021 seems to have had some effect with four publications in the journal since the change. Second, many police researchers do publish in more subject-specific journals. Among those are the researchers in police interrogation and investigation, terrorism, organised crime, but also on police management and leadership[21]. The landscape of specialised journals, including those in policing, has grown considerably, so there is always a possibility of developing one's own small research group. This is an aspect of the development of fragmentation that is common in academia to which I will return later.

Still critical?

The aim of this article is to describe some developments in police research in the Nordic countries. The starting point has been the situation a decade ago depicted by Punch (2015), Valland (2011), Holmberg

[20] I have worked in police research since 2001, am an editor of Ntfk, and have been an editor of NJSP and have also had a central position in the development of the biennial Nordic Police conferences.

[21] So far much of the research on investigation has been tied to the field of interrogative psychology, while management studies often have their home in business studies. One aspect of this is that they have also developed their own master's programmes, but the master for police managers never became operational.

(2015) and Larsson (2015) and the themes presented by these researchers. There are clear limitations in the data presented, but they nevertheless allow some insights into these developments.

Norway and Sweden are still dominant while Denmark, in a Scandinavian context, is lagging. This is not surprising, as the development of police education in Denmark is described by Diederichsen (2017) as one step forward and two steps back. Denmark at first, from 2007, chose the same route as the other Nordic countries towards a more academic education, accreditation of the police academy and professionalisation of the police. This was reversed in 2015 by political decisions to cut down on the basic education of the Danish police.

The point is that the main thrust of the development in police research in the previous two decades had come from the police system and that police education, the academies, have been the epicentre. This development towards academisation of the police has met resistance (Winnæss, 2023). This resistance has come from both within and outside the police. The arguments against academisation have been based on what sort of police we need and want in society but also on questions of basic values and the need for "someone" that can get their hands dirty and use force. Well-educated police officers are often presented as people who do not know how to "take a turn" (Diederichsen, 2017; Winnæss, 2023). This movement towards academisation and professionalisation is seen in many other professions; it is what Halvorsen (2021) calls academic drift.

In Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland the police academies have moved towards academic status as proper colleges aiming at becoming part of the university system. Since 2006 there has been a master's degree in police science in Norway, in 2009 supplemented by one in police investigation. Sweden has seen a rise in the number of police students and locations for education, and a growing number of police researchers at these institutions. The same is true for Iceland and Finland. In 2026 doctoral dissertations in police studies are no longer uncommon, and some of the doctoral researchers have a background in policing.

The ideal of police education in all these countries is that it should rest on evidence, primarily from scientific research (Winnæss, 2023). There are requirements for the academies to have sufficient academically qualified staff; without this competence the institutions may lose their academic accreditation. All these processes push towards scientific production, publications and teaching built on research. As seen in the review of the journals, a large proportion of the articles are written by academics working at or in connection to the police academies. They are what Davies (2016) labels insider outsiders.

This is a relatively heterogeneous group of academics who come from many different fields and have different roles in the police system. Many teach police students, but across a wide array of tasks and topics, ranging from practical areas such as shooting, driving, techniques of arrest, investigation to topics like police law, criminology and crime prevention. There are also many specialist areas such as intelligence, the handling of informants and covert methods and the investigation of cybercrime and environmental crimes. Police research and education are presented as central to meeting the "problems of tomorrow" (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2020). Researchers in many of these fields are often practically oriented. Insider insiders often come to academia with a desire to improve police methods and improve policing. Insider outsiders, by contrast, bring other perspectives, often with a wider societal perspective of police work.

We can see that there has been a clear development towards an opening up of police research for many issues that were under-researched a few decades ago. Early on there were complaints that police science was dominated by perspectives from sociology, law and criminology (Gundhus et al., 2010). The aim was to establish 'police science' as an interdisciplinary subject. At the turn of the century police studies was a rather narrow field; the situation today is quite different. A challenge today might be that the field is wide and has become fragmented into many subdisciplines and narrow specialisations.

In addition, it should be noted that there are now also many other external institutions besides traditional universities that conduct police research. One such in Norway is C-REX, which conducts research on terrorism; business schools do research on police management and the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment on threats and security issues, to mention just a few examples.

One might also ask if the ideal-typical insider–outsider typology should now be elaborated. Many researchers with a university degree have worked in the police as analysts, managers, police lawyers or in other roles before they started doing police research. Many would say they are not "real" police, but in the changing world of policing a wider range of tasks are now handled by civilians. After some years in the police system, how should we label them? It is not unusual for police to get a job in the civilian world and, if they pursue higher education, how do they see themselves? We see these changes already in the research and the role of the police. The role of researchers is also changing.

A concern that was prominent in most of the comments made on the state of research in 2015 and in Davies' (2016) article was that police research would be disciplined, censored and turned into useful but toothless government research. This raised questions about academic freedom and whether the research would be of sufficient quality to be trusted[22]. There are examples from both Denmark and Sweden of censorship of police research and police managers wanting to stop publication or put a restrictive clause on it[23]. Free research is a central component that academic institutions are judged by and seen as a central value in building a functioning police academy. It is important to have free research that can raise difficult questions, question the use of methods, priorities, ways of acting and use of power by the police. Uncritical research benefits neither the police nor the research community. If there are to be improvements, we need to know what is wrong and why. But this freedom has its limits, especially when studying sensitive topics and hidden or secret work (like elements of intelligence work), but also when it comes to protecting persons in a difficult situation or one under threat.

It is not an easy task to balance these two. Finstad (2000; 2018), an outsider outsider, coined her approach to the study of the police as being a "critical friend" of the police. The term must be seen in the light of some of the negative reactions she, as a well-known critical criminologist, got from both criminologists and the police when she began her police studies in the 1990s[24]. The impression one gets of the development in research on the police is that some of the fears were not fulfilled. Police research

[22] See Holmboe (2018) for an interesting legal analysis of the question of freedom of research.

[23] In Sweden Stefan Holgersson is among the researchers that have had problems. Holmberg (2015) mentions examples from Denmark.

[24] Critical criminology is not one theory but rather a position within criminology that is associated with stigma, conflict theories and gender perspectives that are critical of traditional criminology for not taking the power of the state and society seriously into account when analysing crime and deviance.

is no longer primarily an external undertaking; a substantial part is now conducted within the system. Most of us do not need to be friends, since we are a part of the system. This is a position that might not be as bad as Hartmann et.al. (2018) argues in their reply to Davies (2016). The closeness to the field of study might be a resource, providing access to data and close-up approaches. The question is whether researchers have become too close to the field. It is easy to be charmed by the police when gaining access to the field (Lundgaard, 2021; Sollund, 2007). The balance between being an outsider and working in the system can be challenging. The institutionalisation of police research raises many questions. Perhaps we should be more aware of the dangers of not biting the hand that feeds us?

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