Knowing from Within
Making the Case for Embedded Police Research

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ABSTRACT

A current discussion about the role of research knowledge, particularly in Nordic police research, is concerned with research-funding collaborations being too entangled with political interests in documenting best-practices ("what works"), to maintain a trustworthy degree of critical and freely reflexive ethos. Whereas previous debaters find the solution to be one of researchers distancing themselves from their embeddedness with the police organisation they study in, we argue on the contrary that embedded, in-depth and close-up approaches are essential in producing rich enough knowledge from within the police to achieve critical and freely reflexive research-knowledge. In nuancing perspectives on the role and potential of embedded police researchers in contributing to knowledgeable policing, we suggest a framework for Embedded Police Research.

Keywords

Embedded police research, research methods, police research, evidence-based policing

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INTRODUCTION

The need for knowledgeable and effective police services across the globe is more urgent than ever. This is so, not only because Western police services are politically challenged to keep up with knowledge society in general, but also because an intensification of new and ever more complex police responsibilities is occurring. In Europe, the increased immigration from war-torn countries has introduced resource allocations to border patrol, and the seemingly ever-increasing threat from terrorism brings along a new focus on the protection of vulnerable targets. Thus, a new police reality seems to be emerging. A police reality, where police services become police forces and crime prevention turns into target protection. Even though crime in general is decreasing, the threat from organised and serious crime continues to emerge, along with calls for more comprehensive policing strategies.

Meanwhile, the public's demand for service and quality in police work is increasing. Indeed, police services are requested to navigate in an ever more challenging and complex safety and security landscape. In this paper, we are concerned with the conceptual scope and methodological practice of police research as a valuable component in creating knowledgeable police services and police practices. We are mainly driven by the question: *How can scholarly knowledge be of value in order for the police service to develop its practices and legitimacy in the complex safety and security landscape?*

In other words, we are concerned with the exploration and positioning of scholarly knowledge within police organisations, notoriously known for their knowledge-resistance. The backdrop of the article is a fundamental concern that police organisations oversee vital complexities of policing in a democratic society. The promise of 'applying' evidence-based research findings in practice via top-down initiatives in forms of 'guidelines for actions' seems to be dismissive of the extent and power of informal dynamics within the police. We argue that there is a need for a close and engaged collaboration between research and practice, where the dichotomy consisting of respective 'do-ers' and 'knowers' is dissolved as a means of ensuring up-to-date and high-quality police services with a high degree of accountability and legitimacy.

To reach an understanding of this, it is necessary to discuss and elaborate on a recent critique of a tendency in Nordic police research to be colonised by an audit-approach (as reflected in evidence-based policing, for example), in measuring the effectiveness of single police initiatives, and thereby neglecting in-depth qualitative and critical research of more subtle and complex matters in policing (Holmberg, 2014).

The tendency to pursue a narrow understanding of evidence production for "what works," puts police research as a discipline at risk, not only of ignoring other knowledge-resources in academia and practice, but also of widening the gap between the two spheres rather than integrating them in the form of a knowing police force.

To demonstrate what we identify as the main challenges of this gap, we root our discussion in the present situation of the Danish police and our own experience, as we are all present or former in-house qualitative researchers with ambitions to empower knowledge-based changes *from within* the organisation.

From this position, we call for a nuancing of police research, its role and its inherent integrity through an elaboration of what we suggest as *embedded police research* (EPR).

With this term, we wish to contribute to the debate amongst police researchers, particularly those concerned that a close and embedded collaboration between researchers and the police organisation should be considered distrustful and discouraged (Davies, 2016; Holmberg, 2014, 2015). Instead of increasing distance between police and research, as suggested by Holmberg (2014, 2015), we argue that police research should move even closer to the complex realities and challenges of integrating research-knowledge and practice in police organisations.

This embeddedness involves a critical-constructive research position in relation to the police organisation, its practices, and the interplay of these practices with the surrounding society. Furthermore, we argue that scholars should contribute actively to changes of policing, by taking on the role of cultivators and educators in empowering and enabling knowledgeable policing from *within* the organisation.

In suggesting EPR, we point to the necessities, potentials, and delicacies of doing research *with* police, communicated *within* the range of existing understandings and practices, to critically mirror the status quo and spur actual change *across* the police organisation, its functions and hierarchy. As such, EPR is not restricted to a certain paradigm, approach or epistemology; it is an invitation meant for both researchers and practitioners to welcome and integrate scholarly knowledge *through* the pursuit of embeddedness. This means that both police practitioners and researchers must be willing to stretch themselves to the edges of their comfort zones and humbly meet at the uncomfortable conjunctions of a broadened spectrum of research-informed change.

Finally, we propose EPR as a set of guiding principles that accelerate the move towards knowledgeable policing, by widening our focus from 'what works' when choosing actions and priorities in specific police practices, to also include underlying conditions and subtle dynamics of '*why* it works', '*what* may potentially *also* work', '*how* do *we* make this work' and thus a focus on '*what matters* to police organisations'.

In the following we will briefly outline the rise of police research and how the instrumental rationale of EBP has taken the lead before presenting police research in a Scandinavian perspective, particularly within a Danish setting. Against this backdrop, we discuss specific characteristics of police organisations in relation to change and knowledge, the challenges and shortcomings of EBP, and how EPR may serve to mend these, as well as providing valuable insights in its own right. We then explore the role of the embedded researcher, addressing methodological concerns of in-depth engagement within social science and humanities as well as the implications and possibilities of the embedded police researcher. Finally, we suggest the embedded researcher as a critical and constructive friend to the organisation, in our bid as a step towards creating and supporting knowledgeable police organisations.

THE RISE OF POLICE RESEARCH

The transition of Western police services taking place in recent years, from being organised around local crime, to dealing with global, abstract and highly complex crime-patterns and interventions, has increasingly pushed for a move towards a *knowing organisation* (Choo, 1996). As such, a knowing police service is one that systematically enables sense-making of

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events, knowledge creation and informed decision-making with the aim of optimising police services. In this vein, scholarly knowledge plays an increasing role, both in penetrating the walls of the notoriously closed and self-reliant police organisations, to integrating research-based knowledge and collaborating in the knowledge-creating process with external experts as cross-disciplinary experts, in order to leverage knowledge and analytical skills of police professionals (e.g. Gundhus, Hellesø-Knutsen, & Wathne, 2010; Holmberg, 2014).

With this ambition of creating knowing police services comes the dramatic resurfacing of the quest for police practices that are informed by research. As we now argue, however, the current demand for police research has an instrumental heritage, focusing rather narrowly on studies of 'what works', a focus that is reproduced by the popular regime of *Evidence-based Policing* (EBP) and its claim of what counts as evidence for practice (Davies, 2016; Punch, 2015).

Research-based practices have a long history in policing, at least dating back to the legitimacy crisis in the late 1960's, at which point US police had to justify and innovate their traditional services that had proved inefficient and outdated (Weisburd & Braga, 2006). Especially in the US and the UK, police researchers subsequently uncovered several police practices as questionable and out of sync with societal laws and norms, and documented actual police misconduct (Hellesø-Knutsen, 2010; Punch, 2015). Moreover, during the 1980s and 1990s, traditional law enforcement methods proved unable to impact a rising crime curve (Bayley, 1994).

As such, an instrumental rationale emerged within criminological and police research, focusing on 'what works', with the purpose of supporting the development of scientific, innovative and modern policing strategies and methods (often referred to as *smart policing*[1]). This rationale suited political incentives of creating modern policing that would answer the challenges of modern society, including the changes within the criminal environment and the public's demand for service (see e.g. Manning, 2008; Weisburd & Braga, 2006).

The instrumental rationale is also evident in the contributions from hard sciences in terms of the provision of policing technologies, such as bulletproof vests, fingerprint- and DNA technologies, surveillance technologies, automatic number plate readers, etc. (Weisburd & Neyroud, 2011). Thus, the path was already made for the smooth arrival of EBP, which has now internationally evolved into an elaborate policing paradigm shift and government program as "*a law-enforcement perspective and philosophy that implicates the use of research, evaluation, analysis, and scientific processes in law-enforcement decision making*" (Lum & Koper, 2014: 1).

Inherited from healthcare, and due to its fit with political-economic rationales of clear-variable performance measures and intervention strategies, the evidence-based practice approach has been translated into a wide area of public sector services, including policing.

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1. *Smart policing* can be viewed as an overall category for those policing strategies, which hold the ambition to spend resources intelligently and efficiently. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (US) has in 2012 launched *The Smart Policing Initiative* (SPI), which promotes smart policing as: "…*a strategic approach that brings more "science" into police operations by leveraging innovative applications of analysis, technology, and evidence-based practices*".

While the aim of evidence-based medicine is to ensure that the offered treatment is scientifically proven to be effective, and reflects the effort to assign treatment based on a neutral and objective fundament, government agencies worldwide and across services have accepted this approach as the gold standard within medicine (Howick, 2011; Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996). Thus, the evidence-based paradigm reflects an audit rationale of randomised control trials, experimental methods and quantitative data.

Several critiques have been raised, not towards EBP *per se*, but towards the "*dangers of narrowness*" it encompasses (Sparrow, 2015: 20) as a result of too narrow a focus on crime control (van Dijk, Hoogewoning, & Punch, 2016), as well as quantitative evaluations of specific police practices (and thus its proponents) recognising only a narrow scope of what would count as 'evidence' (Ibid.; Holmberg, 2015).

While EBP has no doubt been crucial in the developments and successes of, e.g. crime prevention in relation to hotspot policing, it is symptomatic of the rather narrow instrumental research tradition in police research. Its heritage from a healthcare setting, its appeal to strategic decision-makers, and its reliance on quantitative accountability, results in a colonising of knowledge as its popularity spreads, thereby claiming a very particular form of knowledge while ignoring others which are imperative in capturing the complexities of policing as a whole.

This awareness is even more pressing in the face of the challenges for police research described by Holmberg (2014, 2015), where the field is moving towards agency-defined and -controlled research. This would potentially result in the extinction of a healthy, critical research production and environment, across a diverse range of internal and external knowledge disciplines. Before returning to a critique of the evidence-based paradigm in police research, we will briefly dwell on the role and status of scholarly police research in the Scandinavian countries.

Police research in a Scandinavian perspective

In the rise of new public management and the new security and crime threats, police organisations in the Nordic countries have addressed the above-mentioned issues through reform initiatives focusing on organisational restructuring of police services, police education and the ways in which police tasks are done.[2] These reforms and changes have raised debates about the future role and ideals of policing, including such themes as legitimacy and accountability. To the extent that scholarly knowledge is considered relevant in this endeavour, the virtues of EBP mirror the managerial ambition towards efficiency and effectiveness in policing.

As authors, we either are, or have been, deeply embedded researchers in the Danish police, coming from the humanities and social sciences. Some of us worked as academics in the police several years before becoming research affiliates, and we were/are all

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2. For example, the so-called "Nærpolitireformen" in Norway, "Strukturreformen" in Sweden and "Uddannelses-reformen" in Denmark. The keywords of these reforms are centralisation and standardisation of police work and police educations (see Björk 2016, Fyfe, Terpstra, & Tops, 2013 for an elaboration of such tendencies).

employed *by* the police, but have negotiated terms and conditions to pursue our independent research agendas. We therefore write from the view of academics who have all been through a process of having to legitimise our positions, rights and integrity as *researchers* within an organisation that has few categories (and even fewer positive ones!) for 'our kind' and the academic knowledge we (re)present to the legal and police professionals.

Since Denmark is least productive in contributing to the field of Nordic police research, we believe that it provides a good 'extreme case' of an inside view of challenges and opportunities of widening and deepening the scope and forms of police research, and its interplay with practice.

In Denmark, police research is not an established academic discipline with its own affiliation at the National Police Academy (Politiskolen), or any Danish universities. Research on police-related issues has so far been conducted by single researchers mainly affiliated with criminology environments at departments of law, and with a professional background in, i.e. law, sociology, anthropology and history.[3] Thus, the scene of police research in Denmark is fragmented and has no national gathering point, not even symbolically in the form of a national research-dedicated journal. This fragmentation has resulted in very little police research in Denmark, which is reflected in two literature reviews of police research in Scandinavia in which Danish contributions make up a small amount (see Holmberg, 2014; Høigård, 2005, Valland, 2011). For these reasons, only a minimum of research-based knowledge on police-related issues has been produced and integrated at a national level. Additionally, the National Police Academy in Denmark has not established or maintained a research environment to ensure an ongoing and coherent scholarly contribution to the police profession in Denmark. Sadly, none of the initiatives taken to build up a scholarly environment within the police organisation in Denmark has been able to maintain political support in an ever-changing organisational structure (Holmberg, 2015). To start off as junior scholars in such a research-alienated culture as the Danish police, means finding one's own way off-road (as there is no beaten track), as we have all been constantly moved between departments, negotiating our access to data and organisational support, while changing superiors have tried hard to grasp what we are doing, why we are there, and if we are of any danger or use to them (which rarely had anything to do with our actual research). As such, any in-depth research endeavour in the Danish police is, at least at this point, primarily *informal.*

We hope to affect this situation positively over time, with this paper representing one step towards debate, as well as an appeal to join forces in fostering a fertile and diverse police research environment across the North. However, we *also* believe that in order to 'burst the bubbles' of reservations towards in-depth research-production and -integration in practice, we as researchers must be willing to embed ourselves and our research in the practice we hope to contribute to, rather than detach ourselves from it as previous scholars have argued (Davies, 2016; Holmberg, 2014, 2015).

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3. This can also be said to be true for other Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway, however, Norway has since 1993 established a research department at the national police academy (Politihøgskolen) where police research is instigated in cooperation with various universities and independent research institutions (Gundhus et al. 2010). In other European countries, such as the UK, police science has a longer tradition and the field of policing and thereby police research are integrated as independent disciplines at various universities, governmental and independent research bodies.

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NOT ALL THAT COUNTS IS COUNTABLE: BLIND SPOTS OF THE AUDIT REGIME

Our main concern in terms of the institutional bias towards evidence-based policing is not the seemingly quantitative preference within police research, as a reasonable amount of police research is in fact qualitative in nature. Our worry is the general organisational attitude towards the value and instrumental role of knowledge and research as such. In the wake of NPM, police organisations have, generally speaking, become characterised by a striving towards cost-efficiency, and towards the 'objective' and strategic allocation of limited resources (Ratcliffe, 2008). If research is considered valuable from within police organisations in order to succeed in this endeavour, it should (according to proponents of this tendency) maximise the efficiency of policing, and contribute with readymade quick fixes for the organisation. Thus, the virtues of EBP fit perfectly well with the current logic of police organisations, since it promises knowledge on "what works" and thus on what is most cost-efficient. This is not to say, however, that evidence-based research is broadly applied and used in order to make informed decisions within police organisations. There is still a long way to go in order to make even qualitative research a natural component of police practices. However, the quantitative, efficiency-oriented and number-based logic of evidence-based police research appeals intuitively to the current political environment and (therefore) the strategic preferences of police organisations.

So, even though police organisations formally welcome the social sciences, there is no actual openness towards their qualitative component. Thus, the following critique of the audit regime and of evidence-based police research mirrors our critique of the way in which police organisations tend to parse out the value of qualitative approaches, and how they lack enough engagement with the researchers to actually integrate learning in their practices.

In this respect, what counts as 'good evidence' in present research-based practices reflects a dominant, but narrow understanding of what represents valid and applicable research. Some proponents of quantitative research have argued that qualitative research is invalid because of the lack of standard means of assuring validity; a critique which is fundamentally ignorant of the fact that qualitative research has a different focus on issues that are better explained by pursuing questions of *why* and *how* than of *how many* and *how much* (Denzin, 2009; Maxwell, 1992). As such, studies of EBP seem to ignore that standards have indeed been developed on the premise of validating qualitative 'evidence´, and that policing involves research phenomena, not least social matters, that are very different from those of e.g., medicine.

An obvious demonstration of the tautological tendency of EBP, is its challenge of actually transferring knowledge into practice, while failing to produce useful knowledge about *why* this happens and *how* to change the patterns. Despite the continuous growth in research on 'what works in policing' over recent decades, implementation of this knowledge in practice is still pending. Even Sherman (2013: 39) states: "(…) *there has been a massive growth of policing knowledge over the levels in 1975. Equally important is a second conclusion: there has been less progress in using knowledge than in generating it.*" Thus, how can police research contribute to creating a knowing police service if it merely exists as research reports and academic papers?

In emphasising the point that blurring boundaries between outside and inside researcher positions poses a risk of compromising the trustworthiness of police research

(because of the entanglement in narrow policy and interests), Davies (2016) raises the point that the majority of innovations occurring in police research come from outside researchers, not from inside reformatory forces (Bayley, 2015). What this argument misses out on, however, is how police researchers also point to the fact that such seemingly extensive innovations in reality were implemented with great inertia and pseudo-implementation since police practitioners stuck to 'business as usual' (Ashby, Irving, & Longley, 2007; Bayley 2016; Weisburd & Braga, 2006).

The literature on knowledge-resistance in organisations is too extensive to be covered in this discussion. However, one element is important to emphasise: a sole instrumental focus on 'what works' misses out on crucial aspects of 'what *matters*' in policing, as well as *how* we really make it matter and, as such, fails to understand the broader policing landscape (van Dijk et al., 2016). Policing is a complex endeavour, and everyone who has conducted police research must moreover recognise that this activity is far from straightforward, either. Such elements as the lack of professionalisation of police work and a high degree of autonomy and discretionary judgment amongst police officers make it difficult to even map and describe police work in its most basic forms. In addition, there is a wide gap between formal and informal elements within the police organisation (Bjørkelo & Gundhus, 2015), various occupational cultures dominate certain practices, and police work is in some areas extremely detailed and even rigidly regulated, whereas in other areas decisions and interpretations are up to the individual officer (Granér & Kronkvist, 2014). Police research and police management are therefore endeavours that are challenged by the fact that on one hand the police are organised around a rigid hierarchy with a clear chain of command, and on the other hand the discretionary space of frontline policing is difficult to backtrack or supervise (Bjørkelo & Gundhus, 2015).

As a holistic activity, policing is conducted in the frame of a politically governed public institution which is deeply dependent on legitimacy and public support. Decisions on policing – strategies, methods and tactics for police work – can therefore not be based entirely on 'what works'. As pointed out by Sherman et al. (2014), we have an abundance of studies on hotspot policing, but few studies on how to actually make hotspot patrolling happen in police organisations. Such research seems necessary to help the police *understand* their own organisation and practices, as this is a prerequisite for knowledge implementation, improvements and innovative changes. Furthermore, it might be that, for example, automatic number plate recognition and CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television – video surveillance) is a very helpful tool for the police in tracking offenders and traffic violators, but what consequences and implications do these measures have in a broader societal context in relation to, e.g. privacy, public trust, social interaction and the way that police work is carried out, and how police officers meet the public? Or as van Dijk et al. (2016:33) puts it, "*(we) should (…) avoid capture by the narrow crime control proponents but also raise our sights to examine the broader societal perspectives in order to discern the shifting nature of policing in postmodern society*".

It is therefore a tricky, but crucial task for police researchers to explain and comprehend what is *actually* going on within the police, and how police work is *actually* carried out in ways that really matter – or *would* matter – to a complex set of stakeholders, including the general public. In order to improve future police practices, as promised by EBP, the existing

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ones must be taken into account, since police practitioners tend to fall back on their existing 'know-how' even if they claim to follow newest, best practices (Weisburd & Braga, 2006). As a consequence, police research must rely on thorough analysis of a variety of issues in policing, including more subtle and implicit elements of culture, power relations, rationales, areas of (in)competence, etc. As a saying goes among the Danish police officers: "*Nothing is what it seems to be*" within the sphere of police organisations, something you realise as you scratch the surface hard enough (e.g. Hartmann, 2014; Hestehave, forthcoming). This underlines the need for up-close qualitative research, such as ethnographic fieldwork (Finstad, 2000).

Above, we have critically discussed the EPB approach to police research and the sort of knowledge considered relevant and applicable from within the police as being, i.e. narrow and too strictly focused on quantitative and detached virtues. In the following, we will present what we mean by embedded police research (EPR), and we will list our affirmative arguments for why we believe EPR is a valuable supplement to the ruling paradigm in order to enable knowledgeable policing.

EMBEDDED POLICE RESEARCH

An extensive methodological literature addresses various types of research and researcher positions within the social science and humanities and within police research (see e.g. Brunger, Tong, & Martin, 2016; Gundhus et al. 2010; Cockbain & Knutsson, 2015; Bradley & Nixon 2009). We are not, however, concerned in this context with how our understanding of EPR equals or differentiates itself from other 'applied' forms of research, where contributing to change is a core element, such as *action research* (Flyvbjerg, 2001) or *engaged scholarship* (Van de Ven, 2007). Instead, we will unfold the concept of EPR on its own terms, derived from (a) policing as a subject matter, which proposes specific inherent conditions for the choice of research methods, and (b) the police organisation, which provides particular concerns for the researcher. In the following, we will present in more detail what we mean by EPR, and argue why this serves as a good approach when introducing research into knowledge-resistant organisations like the police.

EPR is research conducted as close to the operational world of policing as possible, whilst still upholding a critical analytical distance. It does not only promote deep insight into specific details of police practice, but rather *requires* it. As such, EPR has its main purpose of obtaining close acquaintance with the empirical setting in which we conduct our study, to again produce reliable and trustworthy scientific knowledge on policing as an activity, and the police organisation as the surrounding frame of this activity. In other words, embeddedness can indeed be crucial for producing sound research, not a hindrance. Embedded knowledge is of course in itself valuable, but it is also a precondition to enable and support the development of knowledgeable police services, which is the second purpose of EPR. Our argument is that the process of gaining deep insight through EPR requires a close collaboration with police practice, which becomes imperative in the process of 'applying' this research knowledge later.

In our view, when dealing with a profession such as policing, core insight into actual working conditions (formal and informal codes of conduct, cultures, mindsets, etc.), is

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important in order to frame the research so that it both speaks *to* and *with* the profession, as well as to and with other researchers. Non-embedded research would primarily speak *about* the profession to peer academics, but in order to obtain knowledge which can contribute to quality and ensure a professional police practice, we find it necessary that researchers interact closely with police professionals and remain attached to the everyday life of policing, rather than producing *hit and run-research* (Uggerhøj & Ebsen, 2014), and leaving the implementation to others. This calls for a researcher positioned within the police, as we elaborate in the following sections.

A frequently quoted scholar regarding researcher positions (Davies, 2016; Holgersson & Knutsson, 2012; Reiner & Newburn, 2008) is Brown (1996), who places police researchers in four categories: (1) *inside insiders*, who are police officers conducting police research, (2) *outside insiders*, who are police officers conducting research after having left the police service in the pursuit of an academic career (both categories can be referred to as 'crossovers'), (3) *inside outsiders*, who are civilians employed by the police or in official roles within the police, carrying out research for government departments or the like (the ones that can be referred to as 'pracademics'), and (4) *outside outsiders*, who are independent academics not employed or commissioned by the police or other governmental bodies. Historically, police research has been carried out by outside outsiders, which is often the case with evidence-based police researchers. There are of course mixes within or extensions of these groups, for example police officers or academics employed by the police who carry out research in collaboration between the police and an independent university. Obviously, it is difficult to claim a 'proper/ideal' researcher role as there are methodological and ethical benefits and costs connected to all these positions, however, some issues seem more crucial than others when it comes to police research.

EPR is primarily situated within the first and third category as *inside insiders* or *inside outsiders*. This employment could be, for example, at a research department at police university colleges, or at research and development departments elsewhere within the police organisation. Below we will promote embedded research by developing the following two statements: (a) embeddedness does not equal entanglement, and (b) embeddedness supports access and enhances constructive changes within police organisations.

Embeddedness does not equal entanglement

Generally, we support recent scholarly concern that police research is becoming increasingly subjected to government and managerial interests (e.g. Holmberg, 2014 & Willis, 2016). While this is a valid worry, EPR does not endorse this tendency. Scholars advocating for external and outside research might criticise an embedded approach for being in danger of 'going native', being too close to one's study object, running the risk of being manipulated, and primarily contributing to the approval of problematic police practices instead of challenging them. As Davies (2016: 161) underlines: "*If researchers become too closely affiliated to their subject matter, there is potential to lose a distanced perspective which is essential to high quality research*" (see also Holmberg, 2014; Wathne, 2010).

Romanticizing one's field is a risk in social research, but perhaps more so in the case of police research, with its tales of heroism and blue lights. But this does not particularly hold

true for embedded researchers who become acquainted with all the window dressings and contradictions of the organisation.

However, our notion of a closer interaction between police research and practice does not compromise an independent scholarly ethos. Reiner & Newburn (2008) underline that much inside-outsider research has been very critical of both the effectiveness and the justice of police practices. Embedded research should of course still follow the basic virtues of research of being, e.g. sceptical, reflexive, critical and rigorous. However, being critical and sceptical does not equal being detached from one's research object, and this is a relevant distinction to draw, because it seems to constitute a core misunderstanding of the motive behind applied and embedded research.

Kanuha (2000) for example, differentiates between 'being native' and 'going native' in her article on conducting social work research as an insider, but she underlines that there are complex and inherent challenges attached to this position. An equally important perspective can be drawn from the homecoming of anthropology, in which Western anthropology replaced its exotic and far-away fieldwork destinations for fieldwork at home; at nursing homes, construction sites, hospitals and other well-known places. This homecoming resulted in a fertile methodological debate on the distance between the anthropologist and her object (Ardener, 1989; Hastrup, 1987; Strathern, 1987). A key question in the debate was whether an inside view inhibits the perception of cultural peculiarities and patterns, or put differently: are we blind to home? The answer is that the proper distance between researcher and field is not a natural function of geographical distance or lack of homeliness. The distance between researcher and object is always an analytical one, and it is created by applying carefully selected theory to our field observations and our fieldworking selves.

Objectivity in social science is thus a matter of objectifying the others and our own being in the field. Scientific distance and objectivity is the result of an ongoing analytical process, regardless of being a newcomer or an embedded researcher. From this perspective, researchers of culture are only really at home in their own science, and their position in the field is that of the professional stranger, including when traversing familiar territory. Scientific distance is an act of will and work. The issue is perhaps therefore more a question of seeking transparency in the methodological (and analytical) framework, regardless of the researcher's position.

As such, EPR is not necessarily politicised (any more than research purely funded through universities is) as a result of the close interaction with police practice, nor is it merely a scientific paraphrasing of native voices. Additionally, the embedded researcher is not another word for the term *from research to invoice*[4], where the core aim of research is seen as creating economic value and growth. The current tendency to call for ever-increasing relevance in research proposals influences all kinds of research, thereby reflecting a global condition for almost all researchers worldwide. However, it would be wrong to lump this tendency with the ideal of EPR, in the sense that the core ideal behind embedded research is different from a value-for-money approach, often characterising the discussion

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4.   In Danish; "Fra forskning til faktura", which was the slogan that summed up the Danish government's much debated plan for tying university research closer to commercial agendas (Ministeriet for Videnskab, Teknologi og Udvikling 2003, "Nye veje mellem forskning og erhverv – fra tanke til faktura").

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of the so-called politicisation of research (Maguire, 2000). The aspiration of EPR is, on the contrary, that the nearness between research and profession ensures that research will more likely pinpoint crucial issues in policing, thus feeding directly into the practice of the profession, and fertilising, for example, a police profession characterised by critical reflection.

Conducting EPR is, additionally, not the easiest path to take. As embedded qualitative researchers, we have all been met with certain conceptions of our work and position from both the academic and the professional world. It seems that embedded researchers are often considered *persona non-grata* in both worlds, and the carrying out of applied research is most often not career-advancing. As a result, applied, cross-disciplinary, and profession-oriented research is seen by the majority of peer academics to be second-rate and tactless research (from within academia).[5] This is not a call for pity. Quite the contrary, it is an objection to the presumption that embedded research is easier, less demanding in terms of virtues and ethical standards, than ordinary police research. The daily confrontation with police professionals demanding one's 'raison d'être' on one hand, and fellow academics downgrading one's work with reference to politicised and manipulated work on the other, will most likely result in the urge to escape into either of the two worlds in order to have the feeling of belonging in one of them. In other words, EPR is demanding for the researcher in other ways than research is usually demanding. The constant reminder of one's position, role, ethical standards, virtues, limitations etc., will in our opinion most likely lead to greater awareness and self-reflection on one's academic capacity and, most importantly, the limits of this capacity.

Embeddedness supports access and enhances constructive changes

One of the most important aspects of police research is *access,* since no access equals no research. To gain access within the police is difficult, even for an insider, as we have all experienced as inside researchers (Rønn, 2012; Hartmann, 2014; Hestehave, forthcoming; Høgh, forthcoming). Negotiating access involves both a formal and an informal process. The formal process is of course more difficult for outsiders than insiders, but the informal process is equally important and is not to be taken for granted for an insider either. In spite of being employed within the police and having acceptance from police management, it is not always easy to gain further formal and informal access from there. Loftus (2010) even indicates that support from management can be an obstacle, as police officers will view the researcher as a 'management spy' (see also e.g. Hartmann, 2014; Hunt, 1984). This underlines the importance, for example, of having a good gatekeeper or having built up good relationships with key police officers in advance. There is also, in our experience of researching certain aspects of police work, a continuous process of having to prove oneself as a knowledgeable and trustworthy person within specific working fields. This can range from overall knowledge on the subject matter of policing and the police organisation, to detailed knowledge of specific operational processes and procedures when it comes to intelligence gathering, opera-

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5. Journals dealing with interdisciplinary and applied research seems to be ranked lower (see e.g. Rafols, Leydesdorff, O'Hare, Nightingale, & Stirling, 2012).

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tive tasks, investigations, etc. (Hestehave forthcoming). Hunt (1984) describes being put to an informal test of police-like behaviour in her fieldwork, having to prove herself as a loyal person, able to tolerate (amongst other things) lying and corruption.

The embedded approach to police research will not only enhance the likelihood of gaining formal access, but most importantly it will increase the probability of gaining crucial informal access to the research field, although it should be underlined that there are no guarantees. The police organisation is a closed world with many inside parallel worlds of exclusion, and to gain in-depth insight into and knowledge about police practice (secret operational issues and the like), is quite difficult. Hestehave (forthcoming) describes how this informal access is negotiated on a daily, sometimes hourly basis, and can be revoked by the research field due to the researcher's small mistakes or random failures in communication, even in those situations where the researcher has worked hard to secure an ideal embedded researcher position. To gain this type of informal access seems almost impossible for at least outside-outsiders who are detached from the police organisation.

Another important issue when it comes to police research is the ability for the researcher to contextualise her findings and, as such, to validate these. This could be information given during an interview or information from written material, which require that the researcher has an in-depth understanding of the issues being addressed, or a relevant network within the police which functions as a 'quality' or 'reality' tester. Policing is a very 'silent' practice, which calls for the researcher to have a preconception and first-hand experience of the field. As such, the researcher's knowledge about and interpretation of the 'cultural pattern of the social group' (Schütz, 1944) being studied is paramount. The police is moreover an organisation dominated by 'the game of internal politics', and the researcher has to be fully aware of the many different agendas connected to different groups and individuals (see e.g. Cockbain & Knutsson, 2015 for further perspectives). Hestehave (forthcoming) elaborates on how one of the first lessons she learned in her employment within the police was to 'play the game of police politics'. As a researcher, the job becomes *analysing* this game, which requires an in-depth understanding of it. The point here is that this 'game' is not immediately observable, but demands patient and enduring exploration, sometimes as an end in itself, and at other times as the important pre-requisite for gaining access, identifying key informants or contextualising information

Finally, the embedded police researcher should, via her embedded role, have the possibility and responsibility of influencing the development of and changes within police organisations and as such, be considered as an active agent who engages with the police in a way which ensures that the research findings are put into play. The nature of such potential changes differs from the changes provided by the detached evidence-producers from the evidence-based approach to research. The difference lies not only in the nature of the findings, respectively on 'what works and on 'what matters', but just as much in the responsibility and role of the researcher respectively as non-responsible for making an actual impact on policing, and as co-responsible for constructive changes within the police, e.g. via the overt presence and everyday interaction with colleagues. In the following, we will elaborate on these researcher roles and argue why embedded research serves as a good approach when introducing research into knowledge-resistant organisations, like police organisations.

Being a critical friend: Integrating embedded research in police practice

Even if embedded police research does not directly focus on generating economic value, other values are at stake, such as justice and safety for citizens and police colleagues, as well as public trust in police organisations as vital institutions of democracy. Therefore, we share the political concern of how society and its institutions may better absorb and implement research and how researchers may become better at sharing their knowledge and results.

As the authors of this paper, we have all had our ups and downs, trying not to lose faith in the practical implications of our research within the knowledge-resistant organisation of the Danish police. We have experienced first-hand that research-based knowledge sharing cannot be enforced by the researcher, neither do we have much control with how it is interpreted. As examples of the latter, consider Hartmann's (2014) attempt to convey a message of the importance of close collaboration across municipal agencies at a meeting with local police chiefs, who have met to discuss possible strategies for innovative approaches to handling troubled youngsters in one of the district ghettos. In trying to explain some of the underlying benefits of the local officers stepping back from the leading role, and instead sharing responsibilities with the other agency representatives, the researcher used the metaphor that "one stick is easy to break, but once you have a bundle, those sticks are very hard to break…" The message seemed to resonate with the officers at the meeting. However, as the meeting ended, the researcher overheard a comment made by one of the chiefs to another: "*I agree with the point she* (the researcher) *made that in order to fight them* (the troubled youngsters) *we need to separate them, you know: single them out, that will make them weaker!*" As this example demonstrates, the researcher may believe that her point had been clearly made by the use of a fairly simple metaphor, when in fact it had been interpreted quite differently and transformed to an operational tactic with no resemblance to the original idea presented at the meeting.

Similarly, we have all witnessed how our internal research reports and publications have been locked up in the drawers by superiors, in the departments of the national police or local police districts. Whether our research conclusions did not fit managerial micro-incentives or larger political strategies, we also had to learn how to really engage different audiences within the police to actually *listen*, not just hearing us out as part of the mandatory ceremony now that the national police had funded our research.

On the other hand, it is also naïve to believe that going public with your critique and ideas about what needs to be changed in the police organisation will necessarily be helpful in pushing research conclusions and recommendations through. Police chiefs are trained in encapsulating public and political inquires within so-called 'project teams' or the like, to deal with such issues officially, and such initiatives are often pseudo-responses to satisfy external stakeholders. Researchers who bluntly 'pull off the pants' of any kind of organisation are seldom welcome again.

While research cannot be imposed on the police organisation, we believe that it is possible to create and use certain 'openings' to share knowledge and inspire practice. As such, it is a matter of knowing when, with whom and how to share and present research knowledge which is crucial.

So, when and how have we succeeded in engaging police practitioners in taking our research recommendations seriously? The answer would be by means of our embedded

research position, through which we have taken a critical-constructive role of engagement as critical friend of the police. This is somewhat different from academia and requires the researcher to embrace – and empower – diversity of knowledge and internal 'research ambassadors'. As the role of critical-constructive friend is important for making use of research in the police organisation, we shall elaborate on this point.

The critical-constructive role of the embedded researcher

The basic premise of free and critical research differs from the premise of politically entangled research as done by in-house researchers and analysts in the police, who do not freely choose their research topic or focus. As Willis (2016:317–318) puts it:

> *The core of a university's value system is academic freedom, where faculty members are free to choose the topic of their research and to present conclusions which are consistent with their evidence without interference from others, including politicians, administrators, and more senior colleagues. (…) Pracademics operate in a different kind of organisational environment.*

But that does not mean that researchers working *in* or *for* the police while being affiliated with a university cannot do critical research. In general, however, doors do tend to slam for researchers who believe that their outside-in critique will revolutionise practice (Chzarniawska, 2007). The leeway for critique in the police organisation depends on how it is construed. Or, as Michel Foucault argued:

> *A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based* (Foucault, 1994: 456).

This explorative and constructive notion of critique does not mean that police research should not voice problematic aspects of police practices, even if this may lead to resistance and place personal doubt on the researcher from within the police organisation, as a command-and-control system hypersensitive of critique (e.g. Holgersson, 2015; Holmberg, 2015; Hunt, 2010; Knutsson, 2015).

But if researchers burn their bridges too fast or too severely, they not only lose their chances for further collaborations with the police organisation, but there is also a risk that they contribute to a research-antagonist culture where doors may close to future research colleagues. Political institutions are generally sensitive to public critique, and failure may indeed have severe consequences for individual police officers and politicians held responsible (Finstad, 2014). Adding to this, the high degree of internal competition with respect to career advancement, as well as a pronounced culture of distrust in people who have no history of direct hands-on operational policing themselves, building the trust and internal networks needed to gain deeper layers of access in the police requires time, energy, and patience.

Our point is that research in critique-sensitive organisations calls for critique that is sensitive to them, but without the 'selling out' of one's professional integrity as a researcher. It calls for a critical friend (Hestehave, forthcoming). Such consideration can be taken through constructive suggestions of alternative understandings and solutions, in ways that

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demonstrate their obvious benefits compared to existing ones. The more a researcher becomes familiar with the cultural norms and codes of influential officers within the police, the more it is actually expected that the researcher demonstrates her 'edges'. This means that openings are created where deep insights and very concrete critical analysis is indeed expected, but in the confidential space of the organisation, not in public forums, because it is costly to lose face and because in-depth concrete analysis can entail the kind of tactical and operational knowledge that would be unwise to broadcast to a wider public, as it could compromise future operations.

But critical observations can of course be debated in research settings, when respectfully presented as general considerations, reserving a wide space for anonymity and leaving out select sensitive information. Even with these constraints, the depth of insight explains how police ethnographies have been given credit for establishing the very foundations of police studies (although long-term, close-up studies of policing struggle due to present funding, training, academic career incentives and governmental evaluation systems).

With critical-constructive embeddedness of police research, we therefore emphasise critique that *invites* and *enables* joint reflection and action, rather than simply exposing defects and somewhat arrogantly pointing fingers from a safely distanced 'armchair' position. Such embeddedness requires at least some willingness to engage actively in preparing and creating organisational receptiveness to research, and it requires that both parties engage in a relationship, accepting and preferably respecting each other (hence the concept of 'a critical friend'). Those of us studying issues of intelligence and investigation have therefore contributed by producing diverse forms of reports and analytical products, heading up various educational activities and seminars to support such activities (Hestehave, forthcoming; Høgh, forthcoming; Rønn, 2012). Hartmann (2014) moreover agreed to facilitate a set of meetings between a local police department and its collaborators in dealing with a high-crime area, although the subject matter of police innovation was not necessarily an issue here *per se*. Such voluntary extra engagements are unique opportunities to build relationships and get a deeper understanding of the intricacies of police work, its subtle cultures, and the challenges the police are facing at multiple levels of the organisation. This is also underlined by Bradley and Nixon (2009) who present an Australian case, where precisely the emphasis on networks, and the engagement and involvement of stakeholders, managers, practitioners etc. is crucial to succeed in the of aim of creating an understanding and value of police research in police practices and vice versa.

As such, the critical-constructive role in the organisation also includes taking up advisory positions in formal settings and meetings and moreover being available for informal dialogue with both managers and co-workers about policing in general, the police profession, the organisation, and the challenges it faces. It is our experience that the mere presence of us embedded researchers/critical friends (and thereby 'knowers' in the eyes of (some) police officers) has an independent value as it often opens up important discussions about organisational development which are not usually taken in the routine-focused police organisation. Both the symbolic and the de facto value of being seen and used as 'knowers' and thereby qualifiers for discussions and decision-making is quite significant in the sense that our contribution as embedded researchers is not merely viewed as superficial consultant-claims, but actually reflects the depth of the police profession.

Rather than positioning ourselves as police researchers in a detached *deus ex machina* role where research tends to close in on a research peer-to-peer loop in a *hit-and-run* manner (Uggershøj & Ebsen, 2014), we should involve ourselves through deep, critical-constructive and persistent engagement with practice. Such embedded police research is crucial to build the level of trust and knowledge from within a type of organisation notoriously known for its inaccessibility when it comes to the *actual* practices and cultural elements it contains.

Only through such deep levels of research engagements are we capable of producing relationships, raising problems of genuine relevance to the police and the surrounding society, and engaging ourselves, co-mobilising the knowledge we produce from within the police. Further exploration of these matters deserves an independent discussion, which we will address in a future paper.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have discussed and presented a framework for *embedded police research*. Doing embedded research requires the researcher to work in close collaboration with the field; first of all to uncover the ideas, values, norms, and workings of the organisation, second of all to take on the active duty of implementing research knowledge back into the organisation, and third of all to challenge beliefs and practices as a critical and constructive friend in order to support the development of knowledgeable ways of working from within the organisation.

Our discussion of this subfield of police research is partly a response to a narrow focus in current police research on effectiveness and 'what works'. While assessment of effectiveness is important to ensure better policing, this does not provide answers on those relational and processual dynamics and contextual factors affecting the outcome of interventions and methods. The prerequisite for getting 'what works' to actually work in police organisations, is uncovering the notions and practicalities of the organisation that act as barriers. EPR can therefore play a key role in solving some of the challenges that have hampered the progress of EBP and other smart policing initiatives, even if this is only an added bonus of EPR.

Our presentation and discussion of EPR is also a response to the concern that police research has become too entangled in political and managerial agendas to maintain its free and critical ethos. EPR shares this concern, but tracing the failure of external reform to significantly impact actual police practice, we argue that it is important to address the issues that matter in policing, and for the police organisation to create a truly collaborative reform towards a knowledgeable police. It is also worth noting that EPR is a normative research pursuit. In a democratic society, policing cannot be anything it pleases. With the rise of terrorism, organised, and serious crime, politicians have bestowed the police with growing powers and competences. In this new safety and security landscape, the scholarly understanding of democratic institutions and tradition of social critique is an important part of ensuring the legitimacy of policing practices.

For some, the idea of embedded research entails the danger of the researcher going native. However, an inside research position should not in itself warrant suspicion. As it has

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been argued, a closeness and familiarity with the police organisation enables the research agenda, as it eases navigation in the game of politics and power, locates points and people of interest, and helps negotiate access and seeing past ceremonial veneer and stage acts. The outside researcher does not have home field advantage and may spend time getting through barriers and be ushered past real problems and critical voices. If inside research is in danger of going native, outside research may never get to the bottom of problems. The point is, of course, that there is no ideal position in police research. The proper scientific position is a question of directed, conscientious effort measured against the methodological and analytical standards of one's science, not one's point of departure.

One of the drawbacks of being an embedded researcher is admittedly the organisation's lack of understanding and appreciation of the contribution of research to policing. As with any research, one's results and recommendations may also run counter to the ambitions and ideas of decision-makers. However, embedded researchers have the advantage of being present in the organisation. Even if recommendations get lost in piles of papers on busy desks and locked in drawers, the researcher is still there, seeking out ways to channel the research into practice, building relationships with research ambassadors, taking part in work groups, shaping internal education, designing and evaluating interventions – all through the perspective and insights of research. Being an inside researcher also enables critique containing classified information to be relayed in confidential forums without rewriting it in such general terms that it may lose its conciseness and empirical reference and thereby its persuasiveness to the organisation.

By presenting a framework for *embedded police research,* it is our hope to nuance the scientific community's understanding of what counts as 'good' knowledge, and by working within this framework it is our hope to decrease the distance between 'doers' and 'knowers' in policing. It is clear that police organisations of today face an increasingly complex and fluid landscape of, e.g. organised crime and terrorism. To address this challenge, police organisations must develop new ways of working and organising at a pace and level of skill that match those of its surroundings. This is no small challenge for an organisation known to deflect change and knowledge. As a critical and constructive friend, EPR is part of the process by igniting and enabling the necessary changes from within the organisation, through a combination of in-depth insight, critique, and close cooperation.

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