Welcome!

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the first issue of Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing (NJSP). As readers with knowledge of the Nordic languages will have already observed, the Nordic title – Nordisk politiforskning – is quite different from the English version. The English title, however, reflects more precisely the aim of the journal, namely to cover policing research in its broadest sense. As is well known, the police are not the only ones who carry out policing – in fact, there is an ongoing discussion as to the importance of the police for the policing of today’s world.

NJSP will publish papers in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and English. We look forward to a wealth of papers from all the Nordic countries, and, hopefully, from our close neighbors such as the Baltic countries.

NJSP is an online publication. Without financial support from the Police University College in Oslo, the Swedish Police academies at the University of Umeå and at the Linneus University in Växjö, the Center for Police Research in Uppsala Sweden and the Danish National Police (Rigspolitiet) this journal would not have been possible.

NJSP is borne out of necessity. The number of articles covering policing is growing in the Nordic countries, but many are published in journals reflecting the author’s academic background and thus go more or less unrecognized outside these specific fields. We believe that it will be beneficial to gather such papers in an interdisciplinary journal, as this will strengthen the academic development within the field of policing.

At the same time, we hope the journal will be able to take advantage of the fact that other Nordic journals – such as the Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab – receives more papers related to policing than they are able to publish. In our view, there is a clear need for a Nordic journal dedicated to policing.

We hope to attract a broad array of both readers and writers. Policing research is undertaken by scholars from many fields – historians, jurists, criminologists, pedagogues, anthropologists, physical trainers, psychologists, media scholars, management researchers, and sociologists just to mention the most common – and the thematic blend is just as broad. An array of methods is put to use, from the study of law over textual analysis, experiments and questionnaires to participant observation. In fact, one of the really interesting challenges for any scholar of policing is the diversity of the field.

This first issue contains several contributions from the journal’s editors. Rolf Granér writes about the importance of humor in police culture. His paper is, to
a large degree, based on his own fieldwork observations. Humor is a serious matter, not least as a safety valve for the frustrations experienced by officers.

An important aim of this first issue of the journal is to look ahead and identify the challenges lying ahead for the study of policing, Nordic style. Lars Holmberg points to some areas of policing that seem to be under-studied, but the core of his article deals with the growing problems researchers experience when trying to study the police using time-honored methods such as participant observation. A lot of the work done by police and other policing agents is, of course, of sensitive character, and researchers must be prepared for some difficult ethical choices. This, however, is not a unique feature of policing studies – all research involving human interaction may generate ethical dilemmas. Still, the rules regarding participant observation in the field of policing seems especially rigorous, to the point where it is all but impossible to obtain permission. This is very worrying, since society as a whole seems to lose insight into, and control over, the police. In Paul Larsson’s article regarding untraditional police methods, this dilemma is at the forefront. Several of the methods used by the police today are both secret and invasive. Still we know little about how, and how often, they are used in the Nordic countries, and we know even less about the consequences of their use. Geir Aas – whose article discusses the possibilities and problems that arise, when the police train specialists to deal with family violence cases – is a prime example of the increasing demands regarding research ethics. He was denied the right to use data gathered through participant observation in his research.

The development towards stricter regulation from research ethics committees ought to elicit a strong reaction. Research on policing is important bot for the police and for society as a whole, and a situation in which the media has easier access to the police than researchers have is worrisome. Actions by the police have a direct impact on people’s lives, as described in the paper by Aas. Police officers may share victims’ a feeling of powerlessness when they have neither skills nor possibilities to solve problems in the family. Denying researchers the possibility to observe such cases makes it more difficult for the police to develop adequate responses to such problems. Similarly, it is of the utmost importance that society gains insight into the more secretive parts of police work. It is difficult to maintain an informed and critical stance to methods and practices that we can only assume to have knowledge about.

All in all, policing research has an important mission to fulfill!