http://www.diva-portal.org

This is the published version of a paper published in *Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Jonsson, C., Persson, M. (2026)
Forming a Scientific Discipline: The Rise of Police Science in Sweden
Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing, 13(2): 1-15
https://doi.org/10.18261/njsp.13.2.1

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-150670

Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing

Scandinavian University Press

RESEARCH PUBLICATION

Volume 13, no. 2, pp. 1–15
ISSN online: 2703-7045
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18261/njsp.13.2.1
Received: 14 December 2025
Accepted: 4 June 2026

Forming a Scientific Discipline: The Rise of Police Science in Sweden

Cecilia Jonsson
PhD, Senior lecturer, Department of Criminology and Police Work, Linnaeus University, Sweden
cecilia.jonsson@lnu.se
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3037-6378

Magnus Persson
Associate professor, Senior lecturer, Department of Social Studies, Linnaeus University, Sweden
magnus.x.persson@lnu.se
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7301-7861

Abstract
In this article, we examine the emergence and formation of police science as an academic discipline in Sweden. The study shows that the steadily growing Nordic field of police research, driven by various disciplines, laid the foundation for the emergence of police science as an academic discipline. The sociological analysis reveals that several constitutive conditions of a scientific discipline are in place, albeit early in the process. Thus, as in other European countries, it is immature and needs to distinguish itself from related subjects, develop subject-specific theories and methods, and establish closer ties to police practice and the police organisation, for example by involving more police officers who can advance the subject in research education. The future of police science also depends on long-term political decisions.

Keywords
police science, academisation, scientific discipline, police research, police work, education studies

1. Introduction
The 1990s are often identified as the period during which academic engagement with police matters began to leave a marked imprint on the research landscape in the Nordic countries (Granér & Larsson, 2008; Holmberg, 2014; Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011). In a broader European context, police research has developed gradually since the post-war period, with scholars from several disciplines contributing to knowledge on policing, even if the link between academic research and police practice has remained uneven (Jaschke et al., 2007). In the Anglo-Saxon countries, academic engagement with policing is older and is typically traced back to the 1950s or 1960s (Bowling et al., 2019; Hoover, 2005). Although police research has existed since the mid-twentieth century, police science remains ambiguously defined and is generally considered immature as a scientific discipline, both conceptually and institutionally (Jaschke et al., 2007; Nägel & Vera, 2020; Roché, 2017).

© Author(s) 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

The institutional establishment of police science as an academic discipline in Sweden is considerably more recent. It was first established as a main field of study at Swedish higher education institutions at undergraduate level (police work) in 2015 and at PhD level (police science) in 2025. Previous research consistently shows that police science is not yet mature enough to be categorised as a fully acknowledged scientific discipline, such as predecessors like law and medicine, or later semi-professions such as nursing and social work (e.g., Etzioni, 1969). However, the defining conditions for a scientific discipline are not entirely settled (e.g., Krishnan, 2009). This becomes particularly evident when compared with the literature on professions, where a scientific grounding is often emphasised as a key requirement (e.g., Etzioni, 1969; Freidson, 2001; Larson, 1977).

Professionalisation ambitions, the growing ties between police education and higher education institutions, and the establishment of police science (Jonsson & Persson, 2023; Martin, 2024; Terpstra & Schaap, 2021) justify analysing the contemporary status of the development of police science and its relation to the police organisation and practical police work. This is especially relevant given that the relationship between higher education and the police organisation is frequently characterised as "fragile alliances" (cf. Bacon et al., 2021). Thus, the aim of this study is to describe the development of police research in the Nordic countries and to investigate the current institutional and disciplinary status of police science in Sweden.

1.1 Delimitations

The study focuses on formal and institutional dimensions of disciplinary formation, while excluding interviews, ethnography and epistemological analysis. It centres on organisational structures and the institutional positioning of police research and police science. As the field is rapidly evolving, the mapping provides a timebound assessment of police science at a formative stage.

Throughout the text we refer to both *police research* and *police science*. The concepts are closely related and partly overlapping, as police research constitutes the research activity conducted within the field of police science. Thus, police research may also be conducted outside the framework of police science as well as it has formed, and forms, an essential foundation for the emergence of the scientific discipline. However, in this article we seek to highlight an important distinction between them. "Police research" denotes research on the police and policing activities conducted within various academic disciplines, whereas "police science" refers to the emerging discipline that seeks to develop and consolidate its own academic domain. This means that we neither engage with nor rely on any of the various proposed definitions of what constitutes police research or police science (cf. e.g, Gundhus et al., 2025; Jaschke et al., 2007). Instead, the terms are applied in a way that enables the analytical distinction on which this article builds.

2. Methods and material

This study combines a historical review with a structured institutional mapping to analyse the status of police science in Sweden. The historical review draws on published research overviews, policy documents, government inquiries, and prior empirical studies to trace key developments from the 1990s to 2025. The institutional mapping, inspired by Aligica's (2006) framework, identifies key organisational structures and arenas relevant to the field's development. Specifically, we examine (i) higher education institutions providing police education; (ii) the establishment of police work and police science as

main fields of study at different academic levels; (iii) research centres and research schools linked to policing; (iv) central stakeholders; and (v) publication channels and conference arenas contributing to scientific communication. The empirical material consists of publicly available documents, including university websites and registries, official reports, government regulations, reports from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), and information from Nordic police education institutions. Taken together, these sources provide an overview of the current organisational configuration of police education and research, as well as the central stakeholders involved in shaping the field.

In our analysis, Aligica's (2006) framework functions as a mapping tool for identifying relevant analytical dimensions, while Stichweh's (1992) theory, presented below, provides a conceptual understanding of the emergence and differentiation of scientific disciplines. The two perspectives are therefore complementary, with Stichweh's theory constituting the analytical framework through which the degree of institutionalisation and disciplinary formation is assessed. By combining longitudinal review with structured documentation of institutional arrangements, the study captures both the historical trajectory and the present organisational configuration of police science in Sweden.

3. Key conditions for a scientific discipline

For the sociological analysis of the formation and status of police science in Sweden, we draw on Stichweh (1992) theory of contemporary scientific disciplines as social systems of scientific communication in which researchers communicate, collaborate and produce knowledge. This social system is constituted by a set of conditions that form the basis of our analysis. Firstly, a) a scientific discipline consists of a stabilised scientific community, where researchers identify themselves as a community with common norms, concepts and methods. It also encompasses b) institutionalised structures and roles, e.g., professorships, educational programmes and research environments. It is c) differentiated from other disciplines. This implies that it diverges from other related fields of knowledge and thereby asserts its own autonomy. A scientific discipline also has d) its own publication culture where scientific communication takes place in recognised forms (e.g., journals, conferences) and is characterised by e) the establishment of "scientific research" as a specific form of action. This means that research is recognised as a specific type of activity, distinct from teaching or application of results. A distinction that the discipline contributes to maintaining. Lastly, it is f) linked to the higher educational system meaning that it is integrated into the higher education system's curricula, which contributes to its stability and reproduction (Stichweh, 1992).

The formation of a scientific discipline unfolds as a process which, in an ideal model, can be traced through three phases (Nägel & Vera, 2020). The prehistory phase is characterised by growing interdisciplinary research interest, which provides an empirical foundation within the subject. In the emancipatory phase, the subject stabilises and develops discipline-specific theories, thereby contributing knowledge that supports the profession with solutions and stimulates further research. The consolidation phase includes a recognised collective definition of the discipline, an institutionalised centre–periphery structure as well as a high level of information flow and interorganisational contacts (e.g., scientific publications and conferences) (Nägel & Vera, 2020).

4. The rise and development of Nordic police research

The following review builds on research overviews to identify key trajectories in Nordic police research, highlighting the emergence of the Swedish strand and the actors contributing to its development. As Norway and Sweden have historically been the main drivers of Nordic police research, the review begins with developments in these two countries before turning to Finland, Iceland and Denmark.

4.1 Origins and early developments

The 1967 seminar *Om politiet og kriminologien* [On the Police and Criminology], organised by The Nordic Research Council for Criminology, is cited as an early milestone in Nordic police research (Granér & Larsson, 2008) though the field took additional time to develop. Reviews indicate that Norway became a Nordic leader in police research in the 1970s, led by criminologists at the University of Oslo with input from other fields (Holmberg, 2014; Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011). During the same decade, Swedish government-based police research began to emerge, primarily through the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), the National Police Board, and the Swedish Police College (PHS), all of which published their own report series and engaged researchers in various studies (Knutsson, 2010). Brå primarily studies police activities, though some research addresses collaboration with other agencies involved in crime prevention. In the early 1980s, the Swedish Police School changed its name to the Swedish Police College. It remained a government-run educational institution under the National Police Board and was not recognised as an accredited higher education institution (SOU 2008:39).

Early Nordic government-produced police research was criticised for its top-down agendas, limited theoretical grounding, reliance on quantitative methods, and narrowly defined research problems (Høigård, 2005). In contrast, others argued that government-initiated research was more closely connected to operational practice and thus more applicable within policing contexts than university-based research (Knutsson, 2010).

4.2 University-based research and institutionalisation

In the context of university-based research, "an explosive development in Nordic police research" was noted from the mid-1990s (Høigård, 2005, p. 139). Yet, police science was not recognised as a scientific discipline. Studies of policing were loosely defined as research with the police as its field, conducted mainly by criminologists, sociologists, and anthropologists (Høigård, 2005; Polishögskolan, 2012). Rooted in university environments, this research was marked by a critical external perspective, theory-driven orientation, and reliance on qualitative methods (Høigård, 2005). Between 1990 and 2005, a pronounced divide between university and state-based initiatives, with little collaboration, is believed to have hindered the advancement of police science (Høigård, 2005).

The Norwegian Police School became the Norwegian Police University College (PHS) in 1992. In connection with this, a research department was established to help make the education and the practical police work more knowledge-based and has since served as a hub for Norwegian police research (Politihøgskolen, n.d.). Apart from the Swedish PHS, which never fully established its research department, Granér and Larsson (2008) agree with Høigård (2005) that Danish and Swedish police research at the time lacked centralised hubs, thereby delaying the development of police research.

Between 2004 and 2009 the Nordic police research continued to grow in terms of number of researchers and scholarly publications (Valland, 2011). A notable shift is the

growing number of police employees researching their own organisation and practice. A large proportion of this research was conducted at the Norwegian PHS, where several Norwegian police employees have earned a master's degree in police science. Nevertheless, police research continued to be pursued across a range of scientific disciplines (Valland, 2011). It is unclear how many Norwegian police officers continued to doctoral-level studies. However, despite the absence of a dedicated police research centre in Sweden, more than twenty Swedish police officers have completed doctoral theses since the 1990s, in a variety of disciplines and on topics related to police work (Jonsson & Persson, 2025).

By 2011, well-established areas within Nordic police research included studies of police organisation, preventive work with children and young people, as well as research on police culture and patrol duties. The latter field was largely based on ethnographic studies and participant observation, sometimes referred to as "back-seat research" (Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011). However, towards the end of the reviewed period, the use of this method declined significantly due to restricted access for accompanying researchers. However, qualitative methods continued to dominate Nordic police research (Fekjær, 2018). Another established area was problem-oriented policing, which is often addressed in relation to inter-agency collaboration and preventive policing.

Nevertheless, this field does not appear to have gained as strong a foothold in the Nordic countries as in Anglo-Saxon contexts (Valland, 2011). Yet, it is observed that police research in the 2010s became increasingly shaped by the priorities of police organisations, reflecting the broader international trend towards evidence-based policing. This development has been criticised and described as an "evidence fixation", with cautionary arguments that it may marginalise critical perspectives on policing (Holmberg, 2014).

4.3 A Nordic research community

Over the years, a Nordic police research community has gradually taken shape and manifested itself in various ways. A referred beginning for a wider research community is a seminar at the Department of Criminology in Oslo in 2000, where around twenty researchers met to present their work and discuss joint projects and progressions (Granér, 2014). In the subsequent years, the collaboration continued primarily through seminars at the Nordic sociological conferences. The first Nordic Police Research Seminar was held in 2007, accompanied by the launch of a newsletter serving as a shared platform. A later conference in 2014 is described as a breakthrough, attracting more than 170 participants to 44 seminars, with a significant proportion of attendees from the police and several sessions led by practitioners or researchers closely connected to policing (Granér, 2014). The Nordic Police Research Seminar is still held regularly, most recently at Malmö University in 2025 (Malmö universitet, 2025). As a result of the Nordic collaboration the first edition of *Innføring i politivitenskap* [Introduction to police science] (Larsson et al., 2014) was published, signalling an ambition to consolidate the police research field. A second edition was subsequently published in 2025 (Larsson et al., 2025), containing both revised and newly added chapters reflecting the continued development of police research and further demonstrating the ongoing Nordic collaboration in the field, with authors representing Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Another outcome of the Nordic collaboration was a one-off doctoral-level course on the theme of police science, offered at Linnaeus University in 2011 for PhD students from various disciplines conducting research on police-related issues (Linnéuniversitetet, 2010). The course was described in Polistidningen (2011) as the first Nordic PhD course in police

science. However, police science did not yet exist as a scientific discipline, and since the course was offered only once, it may be seen as an early attempt to establish police science rather than a sustained initiative to consolidate it as an academic discipline.

As in any other discipline, the presentation, collective discussion, and advancement of the research area require scholarly publication channels. Internationally, there exists a range of scholarly journals dedicated to police science. In 2014 the first Nordic police research journal was launched: *Nordisk Politiforskning*, renamed to *the Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing* in 2020. Initially, as reflected in the journal's change of name, articles were published both in the Nordic languages and in English. Since 2020, however, all contributions have been published exclusively in English. The journal was established to advance and disseminate police research and police science in the Nordic countries, fostering academic quality while engaging both scholars and practitioners, and maintaining an independent, critical role in the field's development (Finstad & Stevnsborg, 2020, p. 166). Ever since its beginning, the journal has provided a platform for research within the Nordic context and contributed to the formation of police research. Prior to the journal's change of name and language, a review was conducted of publications from its inception in 2014 to 2019. It showed that, with a few exceptions, the journal primarily attracted Nordic police researchers, mainly from Norway and subsequently Sweden. It also showed that "sociologically tinted police research has been dominating" (Finstad & Stevnsborg, 2020, p. 166), although police history, police law, and other subjects were also represented. The ambition behind the change of name and language was to attract researchers from other countries, not least Nordic colleagues in Finland and Iceland (Finstad & Stevnsborg, 2020).

4.4 Police research in Finland, Iceland, and Denmark

Finland and Iceland receive only marginal attention in the above-mentioned Nordic research overviews. This has been linked to factors such as the frequent use of national publication languages and less participation in Nordic police research gatherings (Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011). Consequently, their police research was not included in the early comparative research reviews that mapped the first years of Nordic police research, and which form part of the material used in this study (Granér & Larsson, 2008; Høigård, 2005; Valland, 2011). This should not be interpreted as an absence of police research in those countries. Also, considerable developments have taken place since these research reviews were carried out. For instance, a dedicated research unit has been established at Finland's Police University College, where over the years researchers have developed a substantial body of police research in various fields, including cybercrime, economic crime, corruption, and gender equality within the police service, to name a few areas (Polamk, n.d.). In recent years, Iceland has strengthened its position through an increasing number of publications and the establishment of an annual international police research conference, where the 8th *Policing and Society Conference* was held in 2025 (Unak, 2025). Icelandic police researchers have, among other things, focused on topics such as domestic violence, issues related to police education, police officers' mental health, and gender equality within the police force. They are striving towards extending the research hub aimed at advancing the field of police studies (Oddsson et al., 2020). Danish police research has been less extensive than in Sweden and Norway, largely due to its dispersion across small research environments and few active scholars. The field has mainly followed legal and criminological traditions, focusing on crime trends, sociology of law, and police legitimacy (Holmberg, 2014). The 2007 reform briefly expanded police education, leading

to a three-year bachelor's degree in 2011, but political shifts reinstated the two-year programme in 2015 (Diderichsen, 2017). Today, police education is provided by the vocational college Politiskolen, which does not include a research department (Politi, n.d.). Consequently, Denmark lacks a dedicated police research centre capable of bringing scholars together and advancing the field.

The rise and formation of interdisciplinary Nordic police research can be understood as the prehistory phase preceding the establishment of police science. Despite differences between countries, the review indicates that there exists an empirical basis from which further development may proceed. Against this background, we now turn to explore the contemporary development of police science in Sweden at an institutional level.

5. Contemporary development of police work and police science in Sweden

The year 2025 has witnessed significant progress in the establishment of police science in Sweden. This development builds on earlier structural reforms. Since 2000, Swedish police education has been organised as contract-based programmes at higher education institutions. Umeå University launched the first police programme outside the Swedish PHS on behalf of the Police Authority, followed by Växjö University [later renamed Linnaeus University]. Three further higher education institutions have been added and in 2015 the Swedish PHS was closed. Thus, police education is now offered at five higher education institutions (with a sixth scheduled to commence in 2027). The initial aim of locating police education within higher education institutions was to increase training capacity and improve geographical distribution (Sveriges riksdag, 2000). A few years later, the issue of fully incorporating police education into the academic system was raised and advocated in government inquiries (SOU 2008:39; SOU 2016:39). This never materialised, and the issue faded from prominence. Yet processes of academisation were already underway, driven by the higher education institutions with police education. For example, Umeå University assigned the Police Work Unit to further develop the main subject [police work] for advanced and research-level education (Enheten för polisiärt arbete, 2024). These developments mark steps towards establishing police science as a scientific discipline within higher education institutions.

5.1 Police education as a foundation for research centres

Over time, police education units at higher education institutions have developed into university departments that, alongside police instructors, include academic staff. A small number of the academic staff are police officers with doctorates (Jonsson & Persson, 2025). Research and research centres have been established within these departments, though their levels of activity vary (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2025). Some of them have more dedicated research environments, financed by commissioned projects and/or external funding, e.g., the Malmö Centre for Policing and Prevention (Malmö universitet, n.d.-b; Södertörns högskola, n.d.; Umeå universitet, n.d.-b).

5.2 The expansion of police research in Sweden

The most recent review of Swedish police research highlights notable developments covering the period 2010–2024 (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2025). Although the number of publications has declined in recent years, it remains significantly higher than in 2010, with a marked increase in 2018. Overall, Swedish police research has expanded in both

volume and thematic breadth, reflecting a maturing and increasingly multifaceted field. The research has mainly addressed police methods and practices, alongside organisation, governance, leadership, education, occupational health, and use of force. The category *Other Police Research*, covering identity, societal roles, and public perceptions, represents more than half of the publications. While police research appears to have increased at universities hosting police education, other universities are also active within the field. According to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2025) Umeå University (with police education) accounted for the largest share in 2024 – one-quarter of all publications – followed by Gothenburg (without police education), Malmö (with police education), and Linköping (without police education), each contributing equally.

Except for the Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing there is no journal in Sweden (or in Swedish) devoted to police research. However, since the early 2010s, the trade union magazine *Polistidningen* has featured a regular section on police research. This reflects an ambition to connect research and practice by disseminating selected studies to the profession (Personal correspondence with the editorial board of *Polistidningen*, November 24, 2025).

5.3 The introduction of police work as a main field of study

Although the debate on the academisation of police education stalled in the political arena, the higher education institutions pursued their own initiatives by introducing police work as a main subject area and awarding academic credits for the initial police education, resulting in a Higher Education Diploma, 120 ECTS. The Swedish Police has not imposed any requirement for the training to confer academic credits, notwithstanding its placement within a higher education institution.

The higher education institutions have also developed courses in the subject at undergraduate level, with some extending to the master's level in police work (e.g., Malmö universitet, n.d.-a; Umeå universitet, n.d.-a). Table 1 below shows the year of introduction of police work as a main field of study and the current highest level.

Table 1. Introduction year and highest academic level of police work at swedish higher education institutions

Higher education institution	Starting year for Police education	Year of introduction of police work as a main field (highest level)
Umeå University	2000	2015 (PhD level 2024, police science)
Linnaeus University	2001	2015 (BA 2015)
Södertörn University	2015	2019 (MA 2024, police science)
Malmö University	2019	2020 (MA 2024)
University of Borås	2019	2020 (BA 2021)

Establishing courses at undergraduate and advanced levels is a fundamental step in creating a scientific discipline. Without such provision, there is neither affiliation with the academic community nor the possibility of progression to the doctoral level. These courses also enable practising police officers to obtain a formal academic education in their field of study, thereby qualifying them to apply for doctoral training.

5.4 From police work to police science

Following years of teaching police work at undergraduate and advanced levels, the next stage was due. In 2025 Umeå University's Unit for Police Work received approval to establish police science as a doctoral-level research discipline. At the research level, the field is designated "police science" instead of "police work". The former represents a broader domain that includes the latter as a more limited subfield. The definition and designation are also deliberately aligned with terms that are already established internationally (Enheten för polisiärt arbete, 2024). Table 2 below shows the highest academic level of police science in the Nordic countries:

Table 2. Highest academic level of police science in the Nordic Countries (2025)

Country	**Degree**
Sweden	PhD in police science
Norway	Master in police science
Finland	Bachelor in police services
Iceland	Bachelor in police science
Denmark	-

All higher education institutions with police education in Sweden have at least one PhD student affiliated with them, which is not a new development. Throughout the years, PhD students have been admitted in collaboration with other disciplines, some of whom have a police background (Jonsson & Persson, 2025; Linnéuniversitetet, 2023). However, the first doctoral student with a police background to be admitted to the academic discipline of police science was enrolled in 2025. This is achieved through collaboration between the police education units at Umeå University and Södertörn University (Umeå universitet, 2025). In collaboration between the Malmö Police Service and Malmö University, a research school for professional police officers will be launched with admissions starting in 2026. The research studies will be in criminology with a specialisation in Police work (Polismyndigheten, 2025). According to Malmö University, the ambition is that, by having police officers undertake doctoral training, police research and practical policing will be brought closer together (Malmö universitet, n.d.-c).

More academic positions in police science have been filled in recent years. According to Södertörn University (Södertörns högskola, 2024), Sweden's first professor of police science was appointed in 2024. In the same year, Umeå University appointed the first associate professor with a police background (Umeå universitet, 2024). This was followed in 2025 by the appointment of a second professor in police science at Umeå University. None of the full professors have a police background.

The Nordic countries have thus maintained continuous exchange as police research has developed within each national context, while also taking different paths in the development of police research and police science. Based on the material examined here, it is not possible to comment on the current status in the other Nordic countries. In the Swedish context, however, police science appears to have undergone important steps towards the establishment as a scientific discipline and can be interpreted, on the basis of the material analysed in this study, as having entered an emancipatory phase. Its current position in the ongoing process towards consolidation will now be summarised and discussed.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

To conclude the empirical review of Nordic police research and the current disciplinary development of police science in Sweden, we return to Stichweh's (1992) criteria for the constitution of scientific disciplines and discuss where police science is positioned within this process (Nägel & Vera, 2020).

Over the past decades, Nordic police research conducted within various disciplines constitutes a prehistory phase in the emergence of police science. Swedish police research is still conducted by scholars from a range of disciplines. However, research centres and the introduction of police work as an academic subject have emerged, primarily at higher education institutions with police education. Within the police education departments, the establishment of professorships, associate professorships, and doctoral positions in police science, the discipline has been tied to an institutionalised academic structure (e.g., Stichweh, 1992).

Higher education institutions providing police education have deliberately linked course syllabus and academic credits in police work for the initial police education. This means that the subject is integrated into the curricula of the education system and thereby contributes to its stability and reproduction. Police research can therefore be considered established as a specific form of action and recognised as a distinct type of activity, separate from teaching or application of results (e.g., Stichweh, 1992). The introduction of police work, and the development of freestanding courses at undergraduate and advanced levels, laid the foundation for establishing police science at the research level.

Police research centres have grown alongside the police education departments. As centres, they bring together researchers, including some with police background, from various disciplines who share a common interest in police-related issues. Despite researchers' different disciplinary backgrounds, the centres foster a community, signalling, internally, across centres and to the wider community, that they are engaged in the same subject. Thus, a scientific community with the opportunity to jointly develop police science and distinguish it from related fields (e.g., Stichweh, 1992).

Thus, Stichweh's (1992) conditions for the constitution of a scientific discipline may be considered to be substantially met in the case of police science in Sweden, albeit through newly established structures and with differences in degree compared to older disciplines. Police science in Sweden, as in other European countries, is still at an early stage (Nägel & Vera, 2020). Despite many of these conditions being fulfilled, our interpretation is that the discipline simultaneously occupies the three phases. While the introduction of police science at higher education institutions, with associated academic positions and an internationally adapted definition, can be seen as a move into the consolidation phase, it remains largely populated by researchers from other disciplines, suggesting remnants of the prehistory phase. It may therefore be argued that the discipline is currently situated primarily in the emancipatory phase, working to delineate boundaries from neighbouring disciplines and to establish its own research with academic status and professional relevance in order to gain recognition. Most importantly, the discipline must grow and evolve, a process that can only occur with time. The status of police science in Sweden is summarised in t table 3 below.

In our view, the further development and consolidation depend on two crucial factors. Firstly, in Sweden, the debate on the academisation of the police has mainly centred on initial training (Jonsson & Persson 2025, SOU 2016:39), whereas in other countries higher education has been connected to requirements for senior police positions (Terpstra &

Table 3. Status of police science as a scientific subject in Sweden (2025) based on Stichweh's conditions (1992)

Stichweh's condition	Empirical indicators in Sweden (2025)	Assessment
Stabilised scientific community	Nordic Police Research Seminar; research centres, increasing number of scholars identifying as police researchers	Emerging but not fully consolidated
Institutionalised roles and structures	Professorships; doctoral programme in police science; dedicated departments	Recently established
Differentiation from other disciplines	Formal designation police science at PhD level; subject-specific curricula	Partial, still interdisciplinary
Publication culture	Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing; conference arenas; increasing publication output	Established at Nordic level
Research as specific form of action	Dedicated research centres; doctoral student(s) in police science	Emerging autonomy
Integration into higher education system	Police work as main field (BA/MA); doctoral subject police science	Institutionalised

Schaap, 2021). Such arrangements create a clearer link between the police profession and police science, strengthen the latter's legitimacy, and demand relevance to practice. In this way, police science can develop to serve as the scientific foundation for the police's status as a profession (e.g., Freidson, 2001). Greater involvement of police officers in higher education and doctoral training is therefore essential, as the profession must be involved in shaping and developing the subject to ensure its anchoring in practice (e.g., Björk, 2022; Martin, 2024). Conversely, the police must recognise the value of academic knowledge and integrate research and researchers within the organisation, which at present does not appear to be supported by the organisation's structures or by its prevailing organisational culture (Jonsson & Persson, 2025; Persson & Jonsson, 2026). This would represent a significant step in differentiating the field from related scientific disciplines. Secondly, the establishment of a Swedish Police Researchers Association could strengthen the scholarly community by defining membership boundaries and guiding the theoretical and methodological formation of the discipline.

One concern for the consolidation of police science is the Swedish model of organising police education as contract education dispersed across several higher education institutions, rather than establishing a sectoral college as a clearer centre for police education and research (e.g., Terpstra & Schaap, 2021). Within this structure, the research centres may be too small to consolidate police science as a distinct discipline, risking stagnation, absorption into other areas, or fragmentation into separate branches. A further question is whether centres closely tied to initial police education could remain strong and independent if the police were to withdraw it from the university, which is at least theoretically possible. The fragility of police–academic partnerships has previously been noted (see, for example, Bacon et al., 2021). A further point is that the emergence of police science is noteworthy, as it differs from the academisation of welfare professions such as nursing, social work, and teaching, which in Sweden occurred through political decisions during the Higher Education Reform of 1977. Whereas that reform was implemented as a politically imposed, top-down initiative, police science in Sweden has developed along a middle course, neither enforced from above nor driven by the profession, but advanced by academics. This brings us to a final conclusion. As police education is

strongly influenced by political currents (e.g., Tatnell, 2022), we argue that there are strong grounds for believing that the consolidation and establishment of police science as a scientific discipline requires sustained political commitment, with decisions and funding clarifying its future development. Despite uncertainties, police science in Sweden appears, at present, to be here to stay, anchored in several higher education institutions, though its future remains to be seen. In conclusion, we echo Nägel and Vera's (2020) call for more local and regional studies to strengthen the knowledge base concerning the conditions for the development of police science.

Funding

This article is part of the project *A Valid Police (Education): Academic Density and Practical Skills* funded by the Swedish Research Council, case no. 2024-04042.

References

Aligica, P.D. (2006). Institutional and stakeholder mapping: Frameworks for policy analysis and institutional change. *Public Organization Review*, *6*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-006-6833-0

Bacon, M., Shapland, J., Skinns, L. & White, A. (2021). Fragile alliances: Culture, funding and sustainability in police–academic partnerships. *Evidence & Policy*, *17*(1), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426420X15808911426311

Björk, M. (2022). Fältnära Polisforskning: Vad, Hur Och Varför? Högskolan i Borås. http://hb.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1677777/FULLTEXT01

Bowling, B., Reiner, R. & Sheptycki, J.W.E. (2019). The politics of the police. (5th edn). Oxford University Press.

Brottsförebyggande rådet. (2025). *Polisforskning i Sverige*. https://bra.se/kunskapsstod/metodstod-och-verktyg/forskning-om-polisen/polisforskning-i-sverige

Diderichsen, A. (2017). Renewal and retraditionalisation: – The short and not very glorious history of the Danish bachelor's degree in policing. *Nordisk politiforskning*, *4*(2), 149–169. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1894-8693-2017-02-04

Enheten för polisiärt arbete. (2024, October 4). *Till Samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden: Ansökan om att inrätta polisvetenskap som forskarutbildningsämne* [Application, internal document]. Umeå universitet.

Etzioni, A. (1969). *The semi-professions and their organization: Teachers, nurses, social workers*. Free Press.

Fekjær, S.B. (2018). Old and new methods in police research. *Nordisk politiforskning*, *5*(2), 104–123. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1894-8693-2018-02-02

Finstad, L. & Stevnsborg, H. (2020). Reflections on a journal. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing*, *7*(2), 166–168. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2703-7045-2020-02-07

Freidson, E. (2001). *Professionalism: The third logic*. Polity Press.

Granér, R. (2014). Resumé av den femte Nordiska polisforskningskonferensen. *Nordisk politiforskning*, *1*(2), 171–179. https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1894-8693-2014-02-06

Granér, R. & Larsson, P.(ed.). (2008). *Policing in Scandinavia: Proceedings from the conference on police research in Växjö, August 2007.* Växjö: Polisutbildningen, Växjö universitet.

Gundhus, H.O.I., Larsson, P. & Granér, R. (2025). Introduksjon. In P. Larsson, H.O.I. Gundhus & R. Granér (eds.), *Innføring i politivitenskap*. (2. uppl.). Cappelen Damm.

Høigård, C. (2005). *Nytt politi: En kommentert bibliografi over nyere nordisk politiforskning*. Oslo: Avdeling for kriminologi i samarbeid med Unipub AS.

Holmberg, L. (2014). Nordisk politiforskning – udfordringer og muligheder. *Nordisk politiforskning*, *1*(1), 24–40. https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1894-8693-2014-01-04

Hoover, L.T. (2005). From police administration to police science: The development of a police academic establishment in the United States. *Police Quarterly*, *8*(1), 8–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611104267324

Jaschke, H.-G., Bjørgo, T., Barrio Romero, F., Kwanten, C., Mawby, R. & Pagon, M. (2007). *Perspectives of police science in Europe: Final report*. European Police College.

Jonsson, C. & Persson, M. (2023). *Förutsättningar att bedriva polisutbildning inom akademin*. Rapport, Linnéuniversitetet.

Jonsson, C. & Persson, M. (2025). Managing two worlds. Role-exit processes among Swedish police officers with PhDs. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing*, *12*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.18261/njsp.12.1.3

Knutsson, J. (2010). *Den myndighetsanknutna polisforskningen i Sverige: Utveckling och utsikter – en kommenterad bibliografi* (Linnæus University Studies in Policing No. 002-2010). Linnéuniversitetet. https://lnu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:798072/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Krishnan, A. (2009). *What are academic disciplines? Some observations on the disciplinarity vs. interdisciplinarity debate* (Working paper, 1–59).

Larson, M.S. (1977). *The rise of professionalism: A sociological analysis*. University of California Press.

Larsson, P., Gundhus, H. O. I. & Granér, R.(eds.). (2014). *Innføring i politivitenskap*. Cappelen Damm.

Larsson, P., Gundhus, H. O. I. & Granér, R.(eds.). (2025). *Innføring i politivitenskap*. (2nd ed). Cappelen Damm.

Linnéuniversitetet. (2010). *Kursplan: Polisvetenskap/Science of Policing*. (Dnr 2010/2747) [Kursplan]. Växjö, Sverige.

Linnéuniversitetet. (2023, June 29). *Fakulteten för samhällsvetenskap: Dekanens beslutsmöte (per capsulam)* [Protokoll]. Kalmar/Växjö: Linnéuniversitetet.

Malmö universitet. (n.d.-a). *Att följa upp och utvärdera polisiärt arbete (HS682A)*. Malmö universitet. https://mau.se/sok-utbildning/kurser/hs682a/

Malmö universitet. (n.d.-b). *Centrum för polisforskning och prevention*. Malmö universitet. https://mau.se/forskning/centrum-for-polisforskning-och-prevention/

Malmö universitet. (n.d.-c). *Forskarskola För Yrkesverksamma Inom Polisen*. Malmö universitet. https://mau.se/forskning/forskarutbildning/forskarskolor/forskarskola-for-yrkesverksamma-inom-polisen/

Malmö universitet. (2025). *Nordic Police Research Seminar*. Niagara, Malmö. https://policinginsight.com/events/the-nordic-police-research-seminar/

Martin, D. (2024). The re-emergence of police education. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *26*(4), 452–459. https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557241298821

Nägel, C. & Vera, A. (2020). Police science as an emerging scientific discipline. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *22*(3), 242–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355720917413

Oddsson, G., Bragason, B. & Þórisdóttir, R. (2020). Police research in Iceland. Nyhetsbrevet för det Nordiska polisforskningsnätverket. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346905405_Police_Research_in_Iceland

Persson, M. & Jonsson, C. (2026). Neutralisation of polluted academic credentials within the Swedish police. *Police Practice and Research*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2026.2638398

Polamk. (n.d.). *Research and development*. https://polamk.fi/en/research-and-development

Polishögskolan. (2012). *Polisforskning vid universitet och högskolor i Sverige: En översikt (PHS – Polisiärt arbete, 2012:1)*. Stockholm: Polishögskolan.

Polistidningen. (2011, December 19). *Nordens första doktorandkurs i polisvetenskap nu avslutad – Kortintervjun med Rolf Granér*. https://polistidningen.se/2011/12/nordens-forsta-doktorandkurs-i-polisvetenskap-nu-avslutad/

Polismyndigheten. (2025, October). *Första forskarskolan För poliser startar i malmö*. https://polisen.se/aktuellt/nyheter/syd/2025/oktober/forsta-forskarskolan-for-poliser-startar-i-malmo/

Politi. (n.d.). *Historie – Politiskolen*. https://politi.dk/politiskolen/om-politiskolen/historie

Politihøgskolen. (n.d.). *Hundre år med politiutdanning i Norge*. https://www.politihogskolen.no/om-oss/var-historie/hundre-ar-med-politiutdanning-i-norge.html

Roché, S. (2017). Police science: Science of the police or science for the police – Conceptual clarification and taxonomy for comparing police systems. *European Police Science & Research Bulletin*, *2*, 47.

SOU 2008:39. (2008). *Framtidens polisutbildning: slutbetänkande*. Fritze.

SOU 2016:39. (2016). *Polis i framtiden: Polisutbildningen som högskoleutbildning: Betänkande*. Wolters Kluwer.

Stichweh, R. (1992). The sociology of scientific disciplines: On the genesis and stability of the disciplinary structure of modern science. *Science in Context*, *5*(1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889700001071

Sveriges riksdag. (2000). *Skriftlig fråga 1999/2000:823 av Ulla-Britt Hagström (kd) till justitieministern om polisutbildningen*. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-fraga/polisutbildningen_gn11823/

Södertörns högskola. (n.d.). *Polisvetenskap: Institutionen för polisiärt arbete*. https://www.sh.se/institutioner--amnen/institutionen-for-polisvetenskaper

Södertörns högskola. (2024, 29 November). *Södertörns högskola utser Sveriges första professor i polisvetenskap – historiskt steg för polisutbildningen*. https://www.sh.se/nyheter/startsida/2024-11-29-sodertorns-hogskola-utser-sveriges-forsta-professor-i-polisvetenskap---historiskt-steg-for-polisforskningen

Tatnell, A.A.T. (2022). *A degree is not necessarily the answer: A comparative analysis of initial police learning in Scotland, Sweden, and Finland*. (Doctoral thesis, University of the West of Scotland). https://www.uws.ac.uk

Terpstra, J. & Schaap, D. (2021). The politics of higher police education: An international comparative perspective. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, *15*(4), 2407–2418. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paab050

Umeå universitet. (2024, 28 November). *Jonas Hansson – Sveriges första docent i polisvetenskap*. https://www.umu.se/nyheter/jonas-hansson---sveriges-forsta-docent-i-polisvetenskap_12015376/

Umeå universitet. (n.d.-a). *Magisterprogram i polisiärt arbete*. https://www.umu.se/utbildning/program/magisterprogram-i-polisiart-arbete/

Umeå universitet. (n.d.-b). *Polisforskning*. https://www.umu.se/forskning/omraden/polisforskning/

Umeå universitet. (2025). *Sveriges Första Doktorand i Polisvetenskap*. https://www.umu.se/nyheter/sveriges-forsta-doktorand-i-polisvetenskap_12148608/

Unak. (2025). *The Policing and Society Conference*. https://www.unak.is/english/upcoming-events/policing-and-society-2025

Valland, T.D. (2011). Nordisk politiforskning 2004–2009: En kommentert oversikt. PHS forskning,3.