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Outlook: paradoxes, paradigms and pluralism — reflections on the future challenges for police science in Europe

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(2012 Conference in Lyon)

Introduction

The last ten years have seen significant progress in Europe in our understanding of the nature of police science and its role in the development of police policy and practice. Much of this progress has been driven forward by the CEPOL Research and Science Working Group through its annual conference, programme of seminars and landmark publications, including Hanak and Hofinger's (2006) overview of police science and research in the European Union and Jaschke et al. (2007) *Perspectives of Police Science in Europe*. The latter is particularly significant because of the ways in which it draws together the threads of the different contexts and traditions of police science within Europe to arrive at a broad definition of the field as *'the scientific study of the police as an institution and policing as a process'* (p. 23). As Jaschke et al. cogently argue, police science has a vital role not only within society, by providing critical insight into and reflection on what constitutes good policing in democratic contexts, but also within police education and training by helping to stimulate the intellectual development, critical thinking and problem-solving skills of those who work in police organisations. As these authors also acknowledge, however, there are important challenges in the future development of police science within Europe. Some of these challenges lie at an institutional level regarding the location and independence of police science. 'When police science is seen as science which has to follow only the interests

of politicians in charge of the police or of police officers (applied research); they warn, 'the development of a European approach to police science will hardly be possible because ... of their political, national and professional (economic) interests' (p. 11). There are also important methodological challenges around the nature of comparative police research within Europe and the balance to be struck between country-based case studies and the development of survey instruments that can be used at a pan-European level. There are also important challenges in terms of sustaining a broad research agenda within police science. For Jaschke et al., the key question, which must lie at the heart of police science, is: 'what is good policing in [a] democratic society?' (p. 67) - a view strongly endorsed by Peter Manning (2011) in his monograph *Democratic Policing in a Changing World*. As Manning notes, however, the agenda of police science is in danger of being hijacked by those who would limit its use to studies of 'policing as crime control':

'Because the research enterprise has increasingly propounded the notion that crime control is the essence of policing ... and seized on the idea that policing is not just based on several sciences or disciplines but is itself a science ... it has narrowed the vision of the police studies field to what can be measured and manipulated rather than any political, moral, or value-based explicitly democratic position' (Manning, 2011: 107).

For Manning then there are concerns that policing studies are ‘too much about the police and too little about the context or culture of policing, including its legitimacy [and its] grounding in democratic values...’

Against this background, I want to explore two further challenges for the future development of police science in Europe. The first challenge concerns the need to become ‘smarter’ in terms of making research evidence ‘part of the conversation’ about police policy and practice. This challenge emerges from the paradox that police science is viewed by some as a ‘successful failure’: ‘successful’ in the sense that the production of knowledge about policing in Europe and elsewhere has never been greater; but a ‘failure’ in the sense that many claim that the application of knowledge to improve police policy and practice remains limited. The second challenge to be explored in this chapter is around the importance of sustaining a degree of pluralism within police science. Rather than just thinking about police science in narrowly instrumental terms, in which research is expected to have a direct impact on the actions of front-line practitioners, we need to embrace the different uses of research (from instrumental to conceptual), the different types of interventions that researchers make into public discourse about policing, and the different institutions that exist within a European context to promote the development and use of police research.

Setting the context: paradoxes and paradigms

In their reflections on the condition of contemporary criminology, Loader and Sparks (2011) highlight a paradox of ‘successful failure’ (p. 11). On the one hand, criminology as an academic discipline is expanding, with more students, larger conferences and bigger professional associations. Yet, on the other hand, criminal justice policy in western societies remains relatively uninformed by criminological research findings and the demand for evidence to inform policy is still weak. A similar paradox appears to be true of police science. There has been a significant expansion in policing research in recent years in Europe, North America and Australia yet many would claim that the impact of research evidence on policing policy and practice remains limited. Researchers in the United States, for

example, have struck a consistently pessimistic note over the last fifteen years regarding the integration of research-based knowledge into routine police practice. Bayley (1998) writing in the late 1990s observed that ‘research may not have made as significant, or at least as coherent, an impression on policing as scholars like to think’; five years later Goldstein (2003) noted that ‘there is no discernible, sustained and consistent effort within policing to make the basic premise that “knowledge informs practice” a routine part of policing’; and more recently Lum et al. (2012) acknowledged that ‘the notion that science should matter is often trumped by the reality that public opinion, political will or consensus-based opinions about best practices are what should underpin and drive police practices’. It is, of course, important to acknowledge that even if the impact of research evidence on policing policy and practice has been limited, this does not mean that police science should be viewed as a ‘failure’. Police science should not simply be evaluated in narrow instrumental terms but also by its broader attempts to understand and explain the nature of policing. Nevertheless, many of those engaged in research on, for or with the police are motivated by what Loader and Sparks term a ‘reformist impulse’ and therefore want their research to be taken seriously in the world of policy and practice.

In attempting to make sense of limited impact of research evidence on police policy and practice (and of what can be done about it), there have been different diagnoses of the problem. Bradley and Nixon (2009) characterised the problem as a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ in which police and academics are unsympathetic to the concerns of the others and construct an imaginary conversation, of which a short extract is reproduced here:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Academic: | Why do the police ignore research findings? |
| Police: | Why don’t researchers produce usable knowledge? |
| Academic: | Why do the police always reject any study that is critical of what they do? |
| Police: | Why do researchers always show the police in a bad light? |

Academic: Why don't police officers even read research reports?

Police: Why can't researchers write in plain English?

More recently, however, there is growing evidence of innovative activity to establish a 'dialogue of the listening' as exemplified in several innovative police-academic collaborations that have been documented in special issues of the journals *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* (Murji, 2010) and *Police Practice and Research: an International Journal* (Johnston and Shearing, 2009, Cordner and White, 2010, and Fyfe, 2012). In particular there is evidence of several 'fully collaborative' partnerships (Bradley and Nixon, 2009) being established which encourage long-term relationships between practitioners and researchers and can take one of three forms: (1) individual researchers working directly with police agencies; (2) an academic unit within a single university working with police agencies; (3) collaborations of researchers across academic institutions working directly with police agencies (see Engel & Henderson, 2013). Of these three approaches, it is the third type involving structured collaborations that span multiple universities and police agencies that Engel and Henderson contend 'will be the most effective at advancing evidence-based practices in policing agencies', an approach they suggest 'is best exemplified by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research ... a research consortium made up of the Scottish police service and 12 Scottish universities' (p. 13; see also Fyfe & Wilson, 2012).

In another important intervention in the debate about the limited impact of police research on policy and practice, Weisburd and Neyroud (2011) argue that despite progress in terms of the production of knowledge about policing, 'there is still a fundamental disconnect between science and policing'. Policing innovations are, they contend, rarely science-based, relatively few countries in Europe place a high value on police science; and that science is still viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity by the police (contrast with medicine and public health). For Weisburd and Neyroud there are important structural reasons why this disconnect between evidence and practice persists:

'The police operate in a reality in which decisions must be made quickly. And issues of finance and efficiency can be as important as effectiveness. But academic policing research generally ignores these aspects of the police world, often delivering results long after they have relevance, and many times focusing on issues that police managers have little interest in' (p. 5).

Against this background they outline a proposal for a new paradigm that changes the relationship between science and policing, a paradigm that demands:

- the police adopt and advance evidence-based policy;
- universities become active participants in the world of police practice;
- a shift in the ownership of police science from universities to police agencies which would facilitate the implementation of evidence-based approaches and change the relationship between research and practice.

Within a European context, Knutson (2010) has given support to such an approach, arguing that 'police must improve their ability to analyse data, and be more knowledgeable of what works... this cannot happen without the police having a research capability of their own' (p.134). Sherman too has strongly endorsed the arguments of Weisburd and Neyroud, arguing that evidence-based policing is needed not simply to improve public safety but also to enhance police legitimacy. In his 2011 Benjamin Franklin Medal Lecture on 'Professional Policing and Liberal Democracy', Sherman (2011) makes the case that 'police legitimacy may be established not just on the basis of effectiveness under the rule of law, but on demonstrated police mastery of a complex body of knowledge generated by scientific methods of testing and analysis'.

The contributions by Weisburd, Neyroud and Sherman have generated an important debate about the relationship between police science and police practice (see Sparrow 2011 and also Moore, 1995). In a direct response to Weisburd and Neyroud's call for a new paradigm for police science, for example, Sparrow (2011) has argued that the model of police science that has tended to inform evidence-based policing focuses on too narrow a range of social research methods given the way that it privileges

randomised trials and marginalises other approaches to advancing knowledge. Sparrow therefore has concerns that the relationship between police and academia suggested by some proponents of evidence-based policing is 'unstable and unsustainable' (p.7). Drawing on the work of Moore, he argues that the suggestion that 'science should guide and govern policing' adopts 'too narrow a view of what constitutes knowledge valuable enough in confronting public problems, too rigid an idea of where and how useful knowledge accumulates in society, and too unrealistic a view of how knowledge might best be diffused and deployed in aid of both immediate action and continued learning' (Moore, 1995, pp. 302-303).

These debates about police-academic collaborations and the relationship between police science and evidence-based policing are clearly important. In particular, they act as a timely reminder of the challenges involved in forging links between evidence and practice and that police science (like the broader field of criminology) is itself an internally diverse field marked by pluralism in terms of theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches (see too Loader and Sparks, 2011, pp. 18-19). In the remainder of this chapter I want to explore these two points further.

The challenge of knowledge exchange: developing strategies for making police science 'part of the conversation' about policy and practice

There is a growing body of literature examining the challenges of using research evidence to inform policy-making across the public sector (see Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007; Cartwright and Hardie, 2012). A central concern of these contributions is to better understand the processes that facilitate 'the transfer of research-based knowledge out from academic circles in search of research impact' so that research evidence can be used to improve policy and practice in public services (Davies et al., 2008). In particular, the term 'knowledge exchange' is now increasingly being deployed to focus attention on the complex processes involved in the interaction between practitioner-based knowledge and research-based knowledge. As part of this interest in knowledge exchange across different areas of social

policy, there is now a much better understanding of the barriers that limit the use of research in policy-making. According to Nutley, Walter and Davies (2007), these barriers include:

- research outcomes that are messy, ambiguous and contradictory and therefore frustrating for policy-makers that simply want to know 'what works';
- a lack of autonomy to implement findings from research;
- a lack of support for research-based change;
- local cultural resistance to research and its use;
- a lack of incentives or rewards for academic researchers engaging in dissemination activities.

All these barriers are of considerable relevance to understanding the constraints that impact on integration of research evidence into policing yet to date there has been only limited engagement by researchers and practitioners with these broad issues. Bullock and Tilley (2009), for example, highlight how within policing there is often disagreement about what counts as evidence of effective practice, issues about the accessibility of evidence to practitioners and organisational constraints in terms of a lack of support for practitioners to engage with research that might be seen as a threat to professional expertise. Similarly, Lum et al. (2012) highlight a range of issues that hinder receptivity to research in policing. These include an organisational culture and system of promotions that focus on 'rewarding knowledge of procedures and reactivity [and so] help strengthen barriers to using research that promotes proactivity and problem solving' (p. 65).

In attempting to overcome some of these barriers, the literature on evidence-based policy highlights several different mechanisms, which together can help support effective research use (Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007, p.132). These include:

- *Dissemination*: presenting research in formats tailored to their target audience;
- *Interaction*: developing stronger links between researcher, policy and practice communities
- *Social influence*: relying on influential others, such as experts and peers, to inform individuals about research and persuade them of its value

- *Facilitation*: enabling the use of research through technical, financial, organisational and emotional support
- *Incentives and reinforcement*: using rewards and other forms of control to reinforce.

Within police science there has been considerable progress in recent years in some of these areas. In terms of more effective dissemination strategies, for example, there is the work being led by Cynthia Lum and colleagues in the United States around the Matrix Demonstration Project (MDP) (Lum, et al., 2012). The MDP is centred on an innovative knowledge translation tool, the Evidence-Based Policing Matrix, which brings together a large body of police-related crime prevention research that has been evaluated as at least ‘moderately rigorous’. By mapping these studies using a three-dimensional visualisation process, police are in a better position to access the key findings from a large body of research and use this knowledge to guide interventions to deal with specific problems. Within the MDP, the aim is to ensure that the matrix becomes institutionalised within everyday police activities so that, following Weisburd and Neyroud (2011), the police take ownership of how to use findings from existing research (Lum, et al., 2012, p. 21). In terms of improved interaction between researcher, policy and practice communities there are also a range of initiatives which exemplify innovative approaches in this field, including the establishment of Universities Police Science Institute (UPSI) in Cardiff (Innes, 2010) and the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) (Fyfe and Wilson, 2012). Both these initiatives challenge the simplistic assumption that interaction merely involves research evidence being packaged into knowledge ‘products’ by heroic figures and that these products are then transferred to recipients who will be capable of consuming them. Rather UPSI and SIPR have created institutionalised arrangements in which chief police officers and senior academics regularly meet to discuss the research needs of the police service and opportunities for collaboration. SIPR in particular exemplifies the call made by Weisburd and Neyroud (2011, p. 15) for a ‘shared academic-practitioner infrastructure’ in which there is regular and routine engagement around the nature and value of the research evidence base for policing, helping to secure a culture of engagement and a commitment to the co-production of research between the police and academic communities (Fyfe and Wilson, 2012).

The challenge of pluralism and police science: embracing different interventions in the public sphere

This focus on the challenges of knowledge exchange clearly highlights the need for a plurality of approaches in order to achieve the effective integration of research evidence into discussions about police policy and practice. This commitment to pluralism, however, also needs to extend to how we think about the different uses of police research, the different types of intervention that researchers make into public discourse about policing, and the different institutions that exist within a European context to promote the development and use of police research. The need for a pluralistic approach should not, of course, be taken as self-evident. As Loader and Spark’s (2011) recent analysis of the condition of contemporary criminology has highlighted, there are concerns that pluralism in terms of criminological thinking has been constructed as a ‘problem’ and that some in the field have attempted to solve this problem either by seeking a ‘divorce’ from criminology (as in the case of crime science) or by a ‘takeover’ (as in the case of some advocates of experimental criminology). I want to argue that such responses to pluralism are unhelpful and that police science can benefit from a dialogue between those with different approaches to intervening in public discourses about policing and between the different (but overlapping) memberships of institutions that exist to promote and develop police research within Europe.

A diversity of research interventions in the public sphere

In thinking about the relationships between research, policy and practice attention typically focuses on a largely instrumental view of research use in which research is expected to have a direct impact on the actions of front-line practitioners or local/national policy-makers. Within the context of police science, such an approach is exemplified by the use of research to support hotspots policing where analysis of crime pattern data or calls for police assistance provides the basis for targeted patrols to specific micro-locations, such as street corners or housing blocks. Research evidence might also help police to determine what strategy to adopt in these locations, such as such as short-term, high-visibility patrols or enforcement activity, or longer-term problem-solving approaches.

This image of research use, however, lies at one extreme of a continuum which also encompasses, at the other extreme, more conceptual uses of research as part of an 'enlightenment model' where the role of research is to help shape the ways both problems and their solutions are framed (Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007). This can then lead to fundamental shifts in the prevailing policy paradigm as new ideas gradually seep into policy-making processes. Examples of research used in this way might include recent approaches to tackling gang violence. Findings from a number of international studies provide strong evidence that in reducing gang and youth violence police involvement in terms of enforcement and deterrence will only be effective if viewed as one element in a much broader approach that also requires early intervention from social work and education professionals to identify children at risk of turning to violence later in life, and with health workers in Accident and Emergency departments to help identify young people who have been the victims of gang violence. Within the policy community, research has therefore contributed to a reframing of the problem of and solutions to tackling gang violence from one of tougher law-enforcement activity to a multi-agency approach involving police, education, social work and public health (see for example, HM Government, 2011).

These different forms of research use also underline the way in which within the police science community there is a rich diversity of types of engagement with the public sphere and intervention in public and political debate about policing. This is a point cogently argued with respect to criminology by Loader and Sparks (2011) who have sketched out a typology of what different styles of criminological intervention in the public sphere currently look like, ranging from the 'scientific expert' to the 'lonely prophet'. Taking their typology and mapping it onto police science, the following different forms of intervention in the public sphere can be identified with individual examples:

- *The scientific expert* views the task of police science to produce, valid, reliable and useful knowledge about 'what works'; the public role of police science is to use knowledge to challenge myths and to make decision-making more rational and evidence-based. Example: Larry Sherman's work on evidence-based policing and experimental criminology.
- *The policy advisor* focuses on the value of police science in terms of its proximity to tackling problems but also to recognise the importance of protecting the autonomy and independence of research. Example: Nick Tilley's work on crime prevention and community safety carried out in partnership with the UK Home Office and police forces.
- *The observerturned player* is where a researcher moves from academia to work within police agencies in order to better make the link between research and practice' and 'getting one's hands dirty'. Example: Betsy Stanko who moved from academia first into government and then into the Metropolitan Police Service as head of Evidence and Performance.
- *The social movement theorist/activist* is concerned about the close relationship between researcher and government/police agencies and argues for the need to retain a degree of distance and autonomy. The aim of their work is to raise problems for government not to solve problems for government and so it is more focused on developing a critical agenda. Example: Sophie Body-Gendrot and her work on social control, fear and insecurity and the policing of youth disorder in cities
- *The lonely prophet* views police science as being hampered by its proximity to government/police agencies and its small-scale empirical focus and lack of theoretical ambition. Example: Jock Young's work on policing, exclusion and disorder in late modernity.

While these different positions do to some degree over-simplify a more complex landscape, they also highlight the ways in which among those engaged in policing research, there are very different styles of intervention in public discourses about policing aimed at different audiences, employing different methodological approaches, and underpinned by different philosophical and political commitments.

Conclusions: the dynamic landscape of policing and police science in Europe

This paper began with the paradox that police science might be regarded (like criminology more generally) as a 'successful failure'. Within a European context, there is strong evidence to dispute such a claim. There are a growing number of national and European organisations supporting not only the development of policing research but also facilitating processes of knowledge exchange and knowledge integration. The CEPOL Research and Science Working Group,

for example, has mapped over 100 police, policing or public security-related research institutes in EU Member States and associated countries. In addition, 2008 saw the establishment of the Policing Working Group of the European Society of Criminology (ESC) with the specific aims of facilitating the networking of scholars and practitioners interested in the study of police organisations and policing, developing lines of communication and cooperation between nationally based research centres with policing-related interest, and acting as a hub through which scholars, practitioners and the policy community can collaborate through the development of comparative research programmes, knowledge transfer events and joint continuing professional development initiatives. The working group has already had an impact by raising the profile of policing research at the European Society of Criminology annual conferences and organising pre-conference events that have resulted in engagement with practitioners and publications about policing at a European level (see for example, Another important addition to the European policing research landscape came in 2009 with the formation of EPIC (European Police Institutes Collaboration) which brings together researchers and practitioners from several northern and western European countries (including Belgium, Finland, England, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden) based in police academies/colleges and universities. Uniting the membership of EPIC is a commitment to working collaboratively with the police and conducting comparative empirical research. To date, EPIC has focused its work on a number of thematic areas including the challenges of policing multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, the different trajectories of police reform in Europe and a comparative analysis of police recruitment and careers.

The presence of these different European institutions — the CEPOL Research and Science Working Group, the European Society of Criminology Policing Working

Group, and EPIC — all committed to supporting the development of policing research but with different identities, different but over-lapping memberships, and intervening in the public discourse about policing in different ways, is indicative of the strength and dynamism of police science in Europe today. This is important given the rapidly changing context of policing. The impact of austerity measures in many European countries means that not only are many police institutions undergoing radical change but also the wider social and political environment in which the police operate is changing too. Against a background of public spending cuts, police forces in many countries are being restructured, often leading to the creation of more centralised organisations designed to be more efficient as well as more effective in tackling changing patterns of criminality (Fyfe, Terpstra and Tops, 2013). However, these changes raise important questions about future relationships between police and citizens, particularly if greater centralisation leads to more remote bureaucracies and a decline in democratic accountability. At the same time, the police are having to confront the consequences of austerity measures as people take to the streets in large crowds in many European cities to express their frustration at political responses to the financial crisis. Recessionary pressures are also likely to impact on criminality, typically in the form of rising levels of property crime and inter-personal violence. In this situation, the big challenge for police science is to find a way of helping inform police decision-making at a time when the heat of popular pressure and short-term political demands will be considerable. Now more than ever the police need a knowledge base for good professional practice that can help inform a vision of 'good policing' in democratic societies that promotes better public security, a reduction in crime and the protection of liberty and human rights. In short, the challenge for police science in Europe now is to be at the core of 'civilising security practice' (Loader & Walker 2007).

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