

# EDITORIAL

## *Knowledge, technologies and the police*

By Jenny Maria Lundgaard, Brita Bjørkelo, Guro Flinterud & Johanne Yttri Dahl

This issue of the *Nordic Journal of Science and Technology* (NJSTS) is edited by the members of the research project 'A Matter of Facts: Flows of Knowledge through Digitalized Police Practices'. The project is carried out at the Norwegian Police University College and is funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant 301762). The aim of the project is to explore digital knowledge production in policing. Digitalization plays a major role in current plans and strategies within the Norwegian Police Service and digitalization is drawn out as a key process both for fighting and preventing crime as well as increasing efficiency of police work in general. As digital tools are presented as the solution to a host of challenges, there is also a need for more critical reflections on how digitalization affect police practices and knowledge production. Our project thus asks; in what ways does digitalized police practices affect the production of knowledge, both within the police, and in their contact with the public?

We are delighted to present this special issue which examines human-technology interactions and the influence of technologies on knowledge production within policing. We invited scholars interested in some of the same topics as us to contribute, and the result is the seven articles featured. They all examine the role of knowledge and technology in policing in a Nordic context, using perspectives from the tradition of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Each contribution offers new insights into how the interplay between humans and technology shapes what is recognized as 'knowledge' in the context of policing.

Human-technology interaction in police work shape how meaning and value is ascribed to information. These processes are fundamental in creating and sustaining what is considered 'knowledge', which again takes part in shaping the worldviews that the police build their work on and disseminate to the court and the public. In a democracy and under the rule of law, critical scrutiny of the foundation and becoming of 'knowledge' in and by the police is crucial, given their significance and authority in society. As knowledge and technology are inextricably intertwined, this becomes even more pertinent as new technologies emerge and digitalization increased. Decades of science studies scholarship has demonstrated the different ways that knowledge is not a question of finding one pre-given truth, but a process contingent on material-discursive and socio-technical entanglements. Although the role of technologies in policing has been subject to increased scrutiny over the past years, their concrete role in knowledge production has been less studied.

The articles in this issue employ a broad range of theoretical concepts, amongst them actor network theory, epistemic cultures, theories of visual evidence, and socio-technical imaginaries. They underscore the complexities of policing by addressing operational, forensic, and intelligence-led practices, as well as plural policing and the challenges of inspecting the digitalization of the police. They explore the roles of various material artefacts, such as physical evidence, digital registries, and drones, as well as that of auditing models, crime prevention technology, and checklists. Each article provides new explorations and insights into the empirical field they scrutinize, and together they showcase the relevance of studying policing for academics in the tradition of STS, as well as showing the significance of perspectives from STS for police scientists.

The first article is «A Matter of Facts: Mapping Materialisations of Digitally Mediated Knowledge in the Police», by **Guro Flinterud, Jenny Maria Lundgaard, Brita Bjørkelo** and **Johanne Yttri Dahl**. The article present core perspectives from our research project that exemplify how theoretical concepts from STS can shed light on policing. Discussing three cases, the article explores how human interaction with digital technologies take part in shaping what becomes considered 'knowledge', both within the police and in society at large.

In «Negotiating digital traces: The epistemic power of recorded police data», **Helene O. I. Gundhus, Pernille Skjervak** and **Christin Wathne** investigate how *digital traces* following in the wake of intelligence-led policing affects workflows and knowledge production in police units working with radicalization of youth. Analysing officers' experiences, they find that these traces are not necessarily used as envisioned and discuss the importance of police culture for how digitalization plays out in practice.

**Jenny Maria Lundgaard** examines the relationship between *seeing* and *knowing* in «Seeing as One? Materialisation and Distribution of the Police-drone Gaze», where she explores how drone technologies shape the police gaze. Through ethnographic analysis, she studies how drones reshape professional vision in operative policing. While intended to simplify decision-making by providing trustworthy images, drones can also complicate these processes, and achieving a mutual situational understanding in ongoing police operations remains a complex and delicate endeavour.

In «Making space for digital statecraft: The work of consultancy models in an audit of police digitalisation» **Gro Stueland Skorpen** and **Hilde Reinertsen** empirically explore how state auditors use "digital transformation" models to evaluate the digitalisation of the Norwegian Police Service. While the models offer clear directions for achieving 'digital maturity', they lack specific guidance on implementation. The authors illustrate how these consultant-developed models influence the public sector and are engaged with differently by auditors and the police.

«Beyond Error Detection: The Performative Role of Checklists in Shaping Forensic Practices» by **Nina Sunde** explores how checklists may enhance the quality of digital forensic analysis. She examines how checklists extend procedural use and actively shape forensic report practices, as well as the content and quality of such reports. Drawing on practitioners' experiences and peer reviews from a Quality Control Project, Sunde shows how checklists enact professional, ethical, and legal standards, highlighting their transformative capacity.

**Maja Vestad** explores how objects at crime scenes can disclose ordinary human behaviour and daily routines within the extraordinary event of the crime, in «From crime scenes to digital spaces: A mundane object's journey through forensics». She follows the journey of a seemingly ordinary sock as it transforms into something forensically informative through various technological interactions. Thus, she reveals how forensic knowledge emerges as material objects transcend into digital representation and

offers a new lens to explore knowledge production in police investigations.

In «Longing and Lacking: Pasts, presents, and futures in municipal crime prevention technology» **Katarina Winter** investigates how the expectations of a leading crime prevention technology, referred to as 'System X', producers and users materialized in practice. With the use of concepts of articulation work and sociotechnical imaginaries the article findings reveal how imaginaries of the past, present, and future is integral to the establishment of System X. The study highlights the importance of critically analyzing optimism-driven technologies and their tendency to obscure the complex realities they aim to address.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors for their contributions and for selecting our special issue as the platform for their work. It has been a privilege collaborating with you all, and we have gained invaluable insights from reading your articles. With great pride, we now present this special issue to both academics and police practitioners. We are confident that the empirical findings, theoretical reflections, and thought-provoking ideas in these seven articles can inspire further advancements in both police research and practice.

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Special issue guest editors