



Evaluation Report

Name of the unit of assessment: Swedish School of Social Science

Panel: Social Sciences

Michael J. Shapiro, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii at Mānoa, USA, *Chair*

Isa Baud, Faculteit der Maatschappijen Gedragwetenschappen, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Glynis Breakwell, University of Bath, United Kingdom

James J. Fox, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Australia

Peter Golding, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK

Jorma Sipilä, University of Tampere, Finland

Göran Therborn, The Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, Sweden

Theo Toonen, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Karin Widerberg, Dept. of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Norway

1 Scientific quality of the research

Rating (1–7): 5

Supporting Comments:

In relation to the previous research assessment, of 1999, and the issues raised there, considerable and positive changes can be stated. First of all, publication has increased and is now considerable if related to the research active staff. Further, out of all publications the amount in international journals with a referee system is now substantial and the quality of the major part of these are of good international level some even of high international level (especially in the areas of journalism and social welfare). The school accordingly participate in the international debates on the fields of their research. Related to this activity is also their networking with researchers on an International as well as European and Nordic level. The amount of visiting scholars have also increased considerably in this period and the system of "Visiting Readers" is quite successful.



Due to their structure – with only one full professor on each of their fields - this kind of networking and collaboration is however a forced necessity which they on the other hand have made full use of and profited by. So albeit small as research milieus at the school, they are all part of cross national networks and research collaborations that they have greatly profited by. To expand these connections and possibilities they represent, further permanent positions are needed so as to make it possible for the professors to have somebody else take the teaching or administrative responsibilities of their fields. As for the lecturers, they have so far, not increased their rate of publications to the same amount, probably due to heavy teaching obligations. Now having introduced a system where every fourth term should be reserved for research and accordingly free of teaching obligations, an increase in the publication rate can be expected also for this group in the near future.

This increase in international orientation, networking and publications does not seem to have affected the amount of contacts and publications in Swedish and Finnish in any negative way. The Nordic profile, frame of reference and networks are still kept up and there seem to be a conscious effort to publish in Swedish and Finnish when it is of special value or importance. And popularized articles in these languages are an usual outcome of most research endeavours. There is however an expressed concern for also writing academically in these language, to preserve and continue to develop the scientific languages of their respective research fields. This, which they are quite aware, is and will be an even further challenge in the future with the increased demand to “go international”.

Taking into account that only one of their fields have a MA-track, and they do not have a PhD education or degree of their own, their amount of PhD students is decent. Lacking MA and PhD programs the conditions for recruiting researchers are restricted. They have however put much effort into keeping in contacts with their promising BA-students who accordingly have returned to the school to be supervised on higher levels and take part of the research milieus at the school.

As to research funding, finally, external and competitive research funding has also increased since last research assessment evaluation.

2 Interaction between research and society

Based on their fields of research and teaching - especially through the more applied research within the fields of journalism, social work and social policy - the staff relates to the public demands and debates locally and nationally. In this aspect they are exceptional even within the social sciences. They do feel a special commitment to the Swedish speaking populations, to investigate their social situations and conditions. There are lots of arrangements and contacts between the school and the public, to prove the point. The strongly stated and expressed effort to popularize their research for the wider Swedish and Finnish speaking population, is also a sign that the task of enhancing the interaction between research and society is taken seriously.



It is also important to stress that the strong feeling of responsibility towards the Swedish minority – their social situation as well as their language - has expanded to other minorities as well. It accordingly serves as a foundation generating a general understanding and orientation regarding minority issues and ethnic relations, which must be considered of vital political – as well as academic – importance in society today, in Finland and in Europe as a whole.

3 Overall evaluation: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges

3.1 Strengths

- The dual publications strategy (international refereed publications plus local Finnish dissemination) is demanding but effective.
- The international networks they have maintain both their influence and introduce an influx of new ideas and personnel.
- The institute has a strong but small core staff, which is active in all areas of academic activity.
- The international outlook of the department is special covering not only the Scandinavian countries in particular but also Africa and opening possibilities for cooperation with issues of minority and ethnicity all over the world.
- The school shows particular ability to join professors and disciplines in research organizations and topics. National graduate schools are also important in relieving the danger of isolation in small teams.
- The school understands well the need of networking and flexibility in creating networks. This is expressed in the cooperation with its former students and the faculty departments in supervision of MA theses and PhD theses.
- The system of “Visiting Readers”.
- Remarkable growth of competitive funding (Academy of Finland; EU).
- Active effort for interdisciplinary research and discussion (Research café etc.).

3.2 Weaknesses

- The organisational structure (one professor in each study program) does not favour concentrated time for research and strict research program.



- The lack of MA programmes of their own.
- The diversity means that the school as a totality cannot develop a firm research strategy fruitful for all the disciplines. The minority and ethnicity issues are close to this aim.
- Still a considerable amount of publishing in own report series.
- The number of doctoral students and post docs is still small.
- Small disciplines with only a few research active permanent staff.
- The school is somewhat lagging behind other departments in their record in attracting external funding.

3.3 Opportunities and challenges

Dynamics after 1999 evaluation: competitive academic funding, publishing

- The fact that Finland has a Swedish speaking minority is essential for the school's existence. In terms of social capital this is a strength but it also means that the recruiting base for both students and staff is limited. Swedish recruitment of staff could be a remedy and it is a surprise that there are no Swedes among the professors. In spite of these limitations the institution seems to be able to recruit on high level.
- The new MA program is a new opportunity.
- How to balance the desires towards autonomy and towards better research integration with the Faculty of Social Sciences?
- The whole of the research publications is as yet limited although good if related to the total number of research active staff.
- How to manage with the growing importance of the English language in a multicultural society where Swedish speaking population is reducing? Will the international orientation (publishing in English) effect the Nordic orientation in a negative way and narrow the fruitful channel between Scandinavia and Finland?
- There is a noticeable risk involved in the situation in which only one professor is responsible for a discipline. This strongly supports the idea to build and to sustain larger and long-lived groups of researchers.



4 Panel's recommendations for the future

4.1 Research - both single disciplinary and interdisciplinary research

- The university needs to clarify the rules of cooperation between the School and the departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences so as to further the Schools actual work with MA- and doctoral students.
- The number of post docs should be increased.
- The school has well grasped that interdisciplinary applied research is a promise for the school and this should be supported in further recruitments.
- Strong research leadership and organisation within the School are crucial to keep the necessary cooperation going.

4.2 Development of research environment and infrastructure

- Many of the problems connected to external funding and the lack of opportunities for promotion that bother other departments are small in the well-integrated Swedish school. Scientific success under present Finnish conditions, however, means that more of staff will be employed on soft money, creating confidence problems. The ongoing change from a teaching school to a research unit may help in relieving these problems.
- Maybe less fragmentation on the BA-level would support a concentration of the research resources.
- Going to the Centre Campus and sharing the facilities instead of the present situation regarding localities will further research collaboration.

4.3 Research active staff

- More research active positions are needed, for instance, by translating lectureships into university lectureships.

4.4 The role of doctoral/post-doctoral training in research

- The number of doctorates connected to SSKH suggests that the school and the faculty cooperate well in research training.
- Awarding credits for supervising MA and doctoral students for the teaching staff of the School.



4.5 Other issues

- European Unions FWP financing favours the art of applied social research done in the school. This creates a major opportunity for the department to cooperate together and to fully use their national and international networks.